

THE TRUMPET AND THE LYRE: TORQUATO TASSO AND THE PROBLEM OF  
VERNACULAR EPIC IN 16TH-CENTURY ITALY

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## ABSTRACT

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In this dissertation, I analyze conceptions of epic poetry in sixteenth century Italy, specifically the debates surrounding vernacular poetic language, which ultimately produce the first successful Italian epic, Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*. While scholars have mainly focused on early interpretations of Aristotle's *Poetics* and questions of narrative structure, I argue for a shift towards analyzing discourses of language and style, which provide a more concrete framework for understanding Tasso's poetic innovation. Examining linguistic and literary texts from the 1530s to 1560s, I focus on issues of establishing a stable vernacular poetic language capable of equalling classical forms, specifically that of epic, at a time when the epic genre is defined by an exacting set of aesthetic expectations seemingly at odds with a predominantly lyric tradition grounded in Petrarchan love poetry. I argue that an unstable critical moment emerges by the mid sixteenth century concerning the ability of poets to translate the ideal form of classical epic into the mellifluous Italian language. This tension leads to experimentation with various formal elements that concern sound, notably meter and rhyme. I conclude that Tasso addresses this issue of sound with a radical theory of epic style based on the unconventional aesthetic qualities of harshness, dissonance, and sonority. My research therefore constructs an alternative history of early modern conceptions of epic form by emphasizing evolving descriptions of aesthetic experience, particularly of sound, which ultimately proves to be fundamental for the development of a new poetic language.

Ma quando, il crin di tre corone cinto,  
v'avrem l'empia eresia domar già visto,  
e spinger, pria da santo amor sospinto,  
contra l'Egitto i principi di Cristo,  
onde il fiero Ottomano oppresso e vinto  
vi ceda a forza il suo mal fatto acquisto,  
cangiar la lira in tromba e 'n maggior carme  
dir tentarò le vostre imprese e l'arme.

— Torquato Tasso, *Rinaldo* (1562), 1.5

Vero che noi moderni sentiamo troppo le virtuosità del Tasso, specie in quei giochi di scuola che sono spesso le armonie *imitative*: noi preferiamo quell'armonia *rappresentativa*. [...] Vero che la musicalità del Tasso si rivela troppo spesso come *sonorità*; come concomitanza della declamazione. Noi siamo scaltriti nei versi delle armonie recondite e squisite. Ma la poesia del Tasso è quello che è: piena di grandezza e di baldanza. Quei versi sono squilli di tromba.

— Eugenio Donadoni, *Torquato Tasso* (1920), vol. 1, pg. 222

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## INTRODUCTION

*Nell'epica [Tasso] compose la Gerusalemme, nella quale ne diede la forma del poema eroico non prima conosciuta, o almeno non ricevuta nella nostra lingua, la quale sviata dietro alle favole de' romanzi non pareva che fosse atta a ridursi all'osservanza delle regole, all'unità dell'invenzione, all'ordine della disposizione, alla gravità della sentenza, al numero della locuzione e nè meno alla grandezza del verso alla epopea richieste: le quali cose tutte furono con maraviglia del mondo da Torquato in questo suo poema perfettamente adempiute.*

—Giambattista Manso, *Vita di Torquato Tasso*<sup>1</sup>

In 1584 a short anthology of lyric poetry appeared in Florence with works from three relatively unknown Neapolitan poets, Benedetto Dell'Uva, Camillo Pellegrino, and Giovanbattista Attendolo.<sup>2</sup> Seemingly inscribed within a larger cultural movement to promote Neapolitan literature abroad, the volume was ultimately printed only once and seems to have enjoyed little success among the Florentines.<sup>3</sup> Appended to the anthology, however, was a work of much more historical significance, a prose dialogue entitled *Il Carrafa o vero della epica poesia*.<sup>4</sup> This short text, primarily concerned with defining proper epic poetry, would become the catalyst for one of the largest polemics in Italian literary history. The *querelle*, lasting into the early 1590s, consisted in two factions of intellectuals debating the literary value and supremacy of one of two sixteenth-century poems, Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* (1581) or Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* (1532).<sup>5</sup> The *Carrafa*, written by one of the three Neapolitan poets, Pellegrino, set off this discussion by elevating

<sup>1</sup> Giovan Battista Manso (1634). *Vita di Torquato Tasso scritta da Giovan Battista Manso*. Rome: Francesco Cavalli, pg. 292.

<sup>2</sup> *Parte delle rime* (1584). *Parte delle rime di D. Benedetto Dell'Uva, Giovanbatista Attendolo, et Cammillo Pellegrino. Con un brieve discorso dell'Epica Poesia*. Florence: Sermartelli.

<sup>3</sup> The volume's editor, Scipione Ammirato, who had made the acquaintance of more famous poets in Naples such as Bernardino Rota and Angelo di Costanzo, moved to Florence in 1569 where he began printing specifically Neapolitan works. See Rodolfo De Mattei, "Ammirato, Scipione," in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 3, 1961. Treccani. Web. Accessed April 2017.

<sup>4</sup> According to results on *edit16*, the dialogue would be reprinted several times in the 1580s, either alone or as part of a series of documents concerning the polemic surrounding the poems of Ludovico Ariosto and Torquato Tasso.

<sup>5</sup> An overview of the polemic can be found in Bernard Weinberg (1961). *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press and more recently in Stefano Jossa (2002b). *La fondazione di un genere*. Rome: Carocci.

Tasso, a living author, above Ariosto, who had become by that point the first modern classic of vernacular literature.<sup>6</sup>

Yet traces of a similar re-assessment of contemporary vernacular literature can be found within the occasional poetry of the anthology itself. Two particular sonnets, one by Dell'Uva and the other by Pellegrino, present a shared vision of vernacular literature, one fraught with anxiety about its status relative to Antiquity. Despite the fact that they have received virtually no scholarly attention, these sonnets might also serve as historical documents for establishing a broader conversation about vernacular literature outside of the more-frequently cited dialogue. Both sonnets are addressed to Torquato Tasso, who emerges as a heroic figure who has miraculously produced a true epic poem in the vernacular, a form of poetry that had previously existed merely as an idea derived from classical models.

Dell'Uva's poem begins by describing Tasso as a supreme poet, one who has equalled Homer and Virgil by virtue of his expansion of the possibilities of the vernacular and by embodying an ideal balance of a Horatian *utile-dulci*:

Tasso, cui diede il ciel nobile, e raro  
 Ingegno, e ricca vena, e saper vero,  
 Poi che già sete ne la via, c'Homero,  
 E seco il Mantovan primi segnaro;  
 Per l'orme di lor due, ch'innanzi andaro,  
 Con matura prestezza erto sentiero  
 Correte il terzo voi, ma come io spero  
 Lodato ben de l'uno e l'altro a paro.  
 La nostra lingua già molti anni aspetta  
 Il suo poeta, e sin ad hor non l'have;  
 Tal ch'è dal pregio suo molto lontana.  
 Resta, che 'l vostro stil leggiadro, e grave,  
 Giunto a l'utile altrui, quel che diletta,  
 Formi l'esempio de la vita humana.<sup>7</sup>

For Dell'Uva, Tasso deserves praise not merely because his work equals the poems of Antiquity, but more specifically due to his contribution to the vernacular, which has heretofore lacked an example of such supreme poetry.

Pellegrino, likewise associating Tasso with the great classical epic poets, offers even more audacious praise through the description of a rare cosmic harmony between the heavens and the rebel angels brought about by Tasso's work:

<sup>6</sup> For a description of the process of "canonization" of Ariosto, see Daniel Javitch (1991). *Proclaiming a Classic: The Canonization of Orlando Furioso*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

<sup>7</sup> *Parte delle rime*, pg. 30.

O, di che nuove meraviglie, e belle,  
 Tasso gentil, s'adorna il secol nostro,  
 Mentr' i ciel fan contento al cantar vostro,  
 E guidan balli Febo, e le sorelle.  
 Che si rara armonia, da le rubelle  
 E beat'alme s'oda, han gia dimostro  
 Mille, da Campi Elisii; e nero chiostro,  
 Heroi chiamati a riveder le stelle.  
 Onde 'l nostro idioma alzato al segno  
 Per voi si vede de' supremi honori,  
 Che bramò in van più d'un sublime ingegno.  
 Così 'l Latino Homero ornò d'allori  
 Il Tebro, e di par gloria è così degno,  
 Che da un Tosco Virgilio Arno s'honori.<sup>8</sup>

As with Dell'Uva, Pellegrino shifts his emphasis from the specific glory of the *Gerusalemme liberata* to the more general cultural and linguistic improvement enacted by the poem. Despite his own singular genius, Tasso thus becomes the "Tuscan Virgil," and his individual glory is transferred symbolically to the river Arno, the site of traditional vernacular authorities such as Dante.

Both poems provide a window onto the contemporary literary pan-orama which appears, at first sight, to consist in a unified national literature. Rather than specify any particular dialect, geographical region, or other markers of difference, Dell'Uva and Pellegrino emphasize a shared literary language: *la nostra lingua*, [*i*]l *nostro idioma*. Such phrasing on its own seems perfectly normal. Indeed, by the time of publication of these two sonnets there had already been almost sixty years of discussion about the construction of an elite literary tradition through the establishment of which literary models to follow and what kind of language to use.

Yet it is due to this declared allegiance to a larger communal project that Dell'Uva and Pellegrino are able to set the stage for a radical critique of commonly accepted models. For both poets, the lack of specifically vernacular examples of the genre of epic poetry—the "erto sentiero" and "segno" found in Antiquity—has resulted in an impoverished literature. Tasso's miraculous arrival, signalled by a new and uncanny cosmic harmony, has led modern letters out of a long period of waiting ("la nostra lingua già molti anni aspetta"), a period characterized by various failed attempts at a similar poetic enterprise ("bramò in van più d'un sublime ingegno").

Dell'Uva's statement about the lengthy wait for a true "poeta" casts doubt on the works of earlier poets. He employs the vocabulary of earlier sixteenth literary criticism based in

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<sup>8</sup> *Parte delle rime*, pg. 100.

classical rhetoric, not only concerning the dichotomy of *utile-dulcis*, but also regarding a perfect literary style that is both “leggiadro” and “grave.” This opposition between two diametrically opposed styles of writing immediately brings to mind the aesthetic opposition made by Pietro Bembo in his *Prose della volgar lingua* (1525) between “piacevolezza” and “gravità.”<sup>9</sup> As a result, he appears to call into question the stylistic balance of earlier poets, as if they were unable to unite the opposing aesthetic ideals of the “stil leggiadro” and the “stil grave.” Tasso, however, appears to have produced successfully, perhaps for the first time, a form of writing that had only existed potentially in previous writers.

In a more openly polemical fashion, Pellegrino suggests that all earlier attempts to write epic poetry were in vain. In reality, by the 1580s, there had already been several self-declared attempts at creating a “regular” epic poem based on classical rules and models: Giangiorgio Trissino’s *Italia liberata dai Goti* (1547-48), Luigi Alamanni’s *Girone il Cortese* (1548) and *Avarchide* (1570), Giambattista Giraldis Cinzio’s *Ercole* (1557), Giambattista Pigna’s *Gli heroici* (1561), and Francesco Bolognetti’s *Il Costante* (1565-66).<sup>10</sup> Beyond these openly “epic” endeavors, there were also two potential contenders for the title of epic poet: Ariosto with his *Orlando furioso* and Dante, to whom Pellegrino even alludes with the phrase “a riveder le stelle.” Yet, according to Pellegrino, neither manage to reach the “segno” of true epic poetry, and the identity of the true Virgil of the Arno is none other than Tasso, a poet from Sorrento.

Of historical relevance in these poems is not the mere praise of Tasso but establishing him as the culmination of poetic ability within a subversive view of literary tradition. By casually discarding the majority of the modern canon in the name of an almost impossible poetic ideal, these sonnets present an unstated but nevertheless clear critique

9 In Bembo’s dialogue, Il Magnifico claims, “due parti sono quelle che fanno bella ogni scrittura, la gravità e la piacevolezza; e le cose poi, che empiono e compiono queste due parti, son tre, il suono, il numero, la variazione.” See Pietro Bembo and Carlo Dionisotti (1966). *Prose e rime*. Turin: UTET. A more comprehensive study of the critical vocabulary used especially for aesthetic judgments needs to be undertaken. Clearly “leggiadro” and “piacevole” possess different semantic valences. For our purposes, the important point is that both Bembo and Dell’Uva employ a contrasting pair of terms with “grave” on one side.

10 For Trissino, see Claudio Gigante (2010). «Epica e romanzo in Trissino.» In: *La tradizione epica e cavalleresca in Italia (XII-XVI sec.)* Ed. by Claudio Gigante and Giovanni Palumbo. Bruxelles: Editions scientifiques internationales, pp. 291-320; for Alamanni, see Giancarlo Mazzacurati, “1528 – 1532, Luigi Alamanni tra la piazza e la corte,” in *L’Ecrivain face à son public en France et en Italie à la Renaissance*, ed. A. Fiorato, J. Margolin. Paris: J. Vrin, 1989, pp. 52-70 and Stefano Jossa, “Dal romanzo cavalleresco all’epos omerico: il «Girone» e l’«Avarchide» di Luigi Alamanni” in *Italianistica*, 31, 2002, pp. 13-37. For Giraldis and Pigna, see Stefano Jossa, see “Giraldis e Pigna sui romanzi: una polemica in contesto,” in *Critica Letteraria*, 41, 2013, pp. 533-552. On Bolognetti there is little scholarship, even less regarding his relationship to the epic tradition. For a general overview of his literary activities see Albert N. Mancini, *I capitoli letterari di Francesco Bolognetti: Tempi e modi della letteratura epica fra l’Ariosto e il Tasso*. Naples: Federico & Ardia, 1989.

of modern vernacular poetic production. Indeed, they put forward a living author as a direct challenge to those poets already confirmed by the republic of letters.

Such a radical claim might have been ignored amid the other occasional poetry of the anthology, if not for the presence of the polemical dialogue included at the end. Yet rather than continue to ignore the entirety of the vernacular literary panorama, the *Carrafa* addresses many previous authors, focusing in particular on the figure of Ariosto. Through analyzing the faults of Ariosto and the virtues of Tasso, the dialogue sets forward a programmatic theoretical approach for rethinking the conception of the modern canon, an approach derived entirely from the form of epic poetry.

The dialogue itself takes place between Attendolo—the third poet in the anthology—and Luigi Carrafa, prince of Stigliano, during a meeting of the Accademia dei Sereni Ardent in Capua. Of the two interlocutors, Attendolo functions as Pellegrino's stand-in, communicating the majority of the concepts while Carrafa merely asks him for clarification. The substance of this one-sided conversation lies in outlining a loosely Aristotelian framework for defining the features of proper epic poetry. The goal of establishing this approach is to praise Tasso, while also diminishing the importance of Ariosto.<sup>11</sup> For the most part, this framework includes the features of a typical classical epic, such as a unified plot based on historical events with the appropriate number of episodic digressions. Indeed, most modern scholarship focuses on the use of these Aristotelian concepts.<sup>12</sup>

Yet despite the fact that much of the dialogue relies on the *Poetics*, there are clear moments of conceptual tension that emerge when an Aristotelian approach proves incapable of accounting for problems specific to the vernacular language. Such moments are characterized by a subtle shift in the criteria for evaluating the quality of a work. Rather than rely on *a priori* classical models, Pellegrino's characters begin to pronounce judgments based more on contemporary taste and aesthetic sensibility. This latter element appears throughout as a conflict between, on the one hand, the pleasant sounds characteristic of vernacular literature, and, on the other, a more sonorous and Latinate form exemplified by Tasso's poem.

The work begins innocuously enough with a short discussion of the *Doroteo*, a short poem in *ottava rima* written by Dell'Uva.<sup>13</sup> Carrafa enjoys the *Doroteo*, saying that it con-

11 Ariosto's reputation had been gradually developing over the previous decades, and his own chivalric romance, the *Orlando Furioso*, was firmly established as perhaps the most important work in the modern literary canon, following only the poets of the Trecento. See Javitch, *Proclaiming a Classic*.

12 See for example, Weinberg, *History of Literary Criticism*, especially chapter X.

13 The most recent edition of the *Carrafa* can be found in Bernard Weinberg (1970). *Trattati di poetica e retorica del Cinquecento*. Vol. 2. Bari: Laterza, III, pp. 307-344.

tains new turns of phrase and an elevated style that seems to reach the level of Torquato Tasso himself.<sup>14</sup> Attendolo, finding this comparison highly unsatisfactory, claims that it would be better to associate Dell'Uva and his charming style with Tasso's father Bernardo:

poiché lo stile del padre Don Benedetto, per la sua dolcezza, ha più somiglianza con quello di Bernardo che di Torquato Tasso; ma ella ha così detto forse perché il figliuolo ha superato il padre così nella lira come nella tromba.<sup>15</sup>

This distinction between father and son surprises Carrafa, who wonders whether Bernardo should be considered an epic poet at all. This question sets the stage for the much larger discussion on the definition of epic poetry, drawing largely on Aristotle's *Poetics*.

Attendolo eventually claims that the works of not only Bernardo Tasso, but also of Ariosto, and of other modern narrative poets are to be considered merely romances ("romanzi") and not proper epics. For Attendolo, despite the modernity of the form, romance is in reality an imperfect species of the larger genre of epic as theorized by Aristotle.<sup>16</sup>

While the principal reason for this formal distinction between romance and epic initially lies with issues of plot and narrative, Pellegrino later shifts his focus to language, a topic touched upon only sparingly in the *Poetics*. In fact, in the dialogue, questions of Aristotelian orthodoxy give way entirely to stylistic evaluations of both Ariosto and Tasso. For instance, Attendolo claims that the source of Tasso's artistic superiority lies mainly in his use of "nuovi modi di dire e locuzioni più artificiose."<sup>17</sup> In this view, it is not simply an attention to narrative unity, but also a particular and innovative use of language that distinguishes Tasso from other poets.

Indeed, it is within this discussion of style that Attendolo claims that Tasso is "il primo che ha scoperto il sentiero di appressar la meta di arringo così pericoloso e lodato." He

14 "CAR. ... il *Doroteo*, a me dedicato, che scritto a penna lessi già i mesi a dietro, pare a me che nel suo picciol corpo nasconda un'anima grande. Ha egli ne' suoi pochi versi concetti altissimi, vestiti di così belle e nuove frasi del dire in rima, che d'altezza e di novità di stile si può dir che non cede al Tasso figliuolo." See *Trattati*, III, pg. 310.

15 *Trattati*, III, pg. 310.

16 "I romanzi di Lodovico Ariosto, di Bernardo Tasso, di Luigi Alamanni e d'altri uomini di conto, benché non abbiano la perfezione dovuta ad epico poema, ne han però qualche parte, essendo per entro aspersi di bellissimi lumi di dottrina e di poesia, ombreggiando chi più e chi meno – ancor che non dipingano con perfetti colori – questa bella immagine della eroica dignità" (p. 314). Later on, he says even more explicitly, "Sono poeti del primo grado ma imperfettamente [...] Perciò che dovendo eglino, sì come richiede la perfezion dell'epopea, da una sola azione formar un sol corpo [...] in iscambio di ciò formarono un mostro di più capi e di diverse membra non ordinate" (pg. 315).

17 *Trattati*, III, pg. 338. Attendolo also says that Tasso used many "modi di dir poetici, lontani in tutto dal parlar dell'uso commune." Yet he defends Tasso writing, "Può il poeta con la scelta e sola collocazione delle voci far che la locuzione sia pura, candida e spiritosa, e può anco adornandola di traslati e di altre figure del dire generar nell'animo di chi legge diletto e maraviglia. Et in questa parte non è dubbio che l'Ariosto non ha valuto molto, avendo sparse nel suo poema molte volte locuzioni lombarde più che toscane; e ciò fece egli tirato da occulta forza dell'uso del parlar della sua patria" (pg. 338).

elaborates on this notion of danger by introducing the names of two other sixteenth century poets, Giangiorgio Trissino and Luigi Alamanni, who had claimed explicitly to write the first epic poems in the vernacular. For Attendolo, they are both “uomini chiarissimi,” accurately following both Aristotelian narrative norms as well as ancient models like Homer. Nevertheless, their works—*Italia liberata* (1548) and *Girone il Cortese* (1548)—both failed to achieve any lasting success. As a result, Attendolo claims, both poets “aveano quasi disperati gli animi de’ begli ingegni e confermata quella falsa credenza che la volgar lingua per natia debolezza non era atta a sostener il peso della eroica dignità.”<sup>18</sup> In other words, the issue of epic poetry, as exemplified by classical models, is more than a matter of theoretical erudition and imitative precision. In Attendolo’s view, the very possibility of a vernacular instantiation of such poetry is at stake due to the perceived qualities of the language itself.

Such a remark lines up well with the main thrust of the two sonnets from earlier in the volume: the vernacular tradition attempted to reach the level of classical literature but failed. In Attendolo’s condemnation of Trissino and Alamanni, two important points emerge. First, adherence to classical poetic norms is no guarantee of the success of a poem or its author. Instead, a vernacular poet must be capable of introducing some new element into the language, although it is unclear the substance of that element. Second, the attribution of this opinion to an anonymous third party (“quella falsa credenza”) allows Pellegrino to critique other, more widely held beliefs about the possibilities and limits of the vernacular.

This shift away from a strictly Aristotelian framework to the nature of the vernacular language itself surprises Attendolo’s interlocutor, Carrafa, who asks about the unnamed individuals who doubt the possibility of vernacular epic. Attendolo responds by referring to the apparent concern that the most elemental parts of a language, its letters, may produce an overall sound and feeling improper for singing of war:

Ve ne sono stati [uomini di questa opinione] e credo che ancor ve ne sieno, i quali si fondano sopra molte apparenti ragioni. E fra l’altre non posso tacerne una, che e’ dicono, che la nostra volgar favella, avendo tutte le voci terminanti in elemento vocale, dalla composizione di sì fatte voci non può formarsi oration grave e piena di maestà, chente la greca e latina lingua veggiamo avere, e che perciò con la sua languidezza ella è solo atta a cantar le paci e le guerre di Amore, e non l’ire e le battaglie di Marte.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *Trattati*, III, pg. 339.

<sup>19</sup> *Trattati*, III, pg. 339.



Between the vernacular and classical languages we therefore find two competing sets of assumptions that derive from the experience of the sound of the language itself. On the one hand, the phonetic texture of the vernacular produces a languid sound associated with themes of love and peace. On the other hand, classical languages seem naturally capable of *gravitas* and majesty, terms associated with the tonal ranges necessary for the singing of anger and war.

In response to these unnamed skeptics, Attendolo posits that the nature of language itself is not the problem, but rather custom and historical contingency. Greek and Latin literature had simply produced supreme models of epic which influenced the later development of their respective poetic traditions. On the other hand, the vernacular has found itself with “poeti lirici et elegi migliori che non ebbe (con pace di Pindaro e di Orazio) né la greca né la latina.”<sup>20</sup> The apparently lyrical nature of the vernacular arises from the fact that subsequent poets had followed their own supreme model, Petrarch. For Attendolo, as a consequence of this long reliance on one model, the vernacular seemingly sounds better within a given thematic range, namely love poetry.

Though they ultimately reject the hypothesis that the overly vocalic nature of the vernacular prevents epic grandeur, both interlocutors still seem anxious to address the problem of a “languid” sounding language. Continuing to discuss the traditional model of the *Canzoniere*, Attendolo claims that Petrarch himself offers examples for constructing a phonic texture appropriate for epic poetry. For example, a poet may string together multiple vowels—producing a “concorso di vocali”—to create a harsh sound and offset the “sweetness” of the vernacular. Such a technique can be found in one of Petrarch’s sonnets, when he writes “e in fiamma amorosa arse” (*RVF* 304).<sup>21</sup> In fact, one of the primary goals that emerges from the dialogue is that of establishing techniques for producing sonority which might “fill the ears” (“riempire gli orecchi”) of the reader or listener.<sup>22</sup> Surprisingly, the previously mentioned problem of an abundance of vowels then becomes the solution for producing epic language. Likewise, the fact that the vernacular has historically had a stronger lyric tradition in Petrarch can also lead to the production of epic poetry, if one

<sup>20</sup> *Trattati*, III, pg. 339.

<sup>21</sup> Attendolo focuses on one specific compositional technique available to poets for using vowels to produce sonority, hiatus (“iato”), a sequencing of vowels that can occur either within words or between them. At the level of word choice, Attendolo offers several examples: “aura, auro, fausto, tesauero, Boote, aureo e burneo.” All of these are “magnifiche e sonori voci.” At the level of composition, a poet could also place words adjacent to one another with no intervening consonant, such as in Petrarch’s line. See *Trattati*, pg. 340.

<sup>22</sup> Discussing the options in Latin, for instance, Attendolo states, “E chi non sa che nella latina lingua “pondo” suoni più grave e più riempia l’orecchie che “pondus,” e che nella volgare, di questi nomi proprii avuti da’ Greci, Creonte e Cresfonte, il primo sia più ritondo e sonoro che il secondo non è, benché accresciuto di due consonanti?” See *Trattati*, pg. 340.

understands the ways in which those same lyrical sounds can be used to new sonorous ends.

Apart from Petrarch, however, such potential sonority is also further placed in contrast with the “dolcezza” of Ariosto’s poetry. Attendolo, by the end of the dialogue, offers a peculiar metric for judging the value of Tasso’s poem over Ariosto’s. In the future, once the current vernacular has fallen out of use like Latin, only Tasso’s poem will be read and studied. Ariosto’s poem, on the other hand, will vanish:

E la ragion è che la dolcezza che nasce dal natio e dal chiaro della sentenza usata dall’Ariosto, non diletta come ora fa l’orecchio della moltitudine, ragionandosi allora altra lingua, converrebbe che l’Orlando furioso con parti perfette di poesia appagasse l’intelletto de’ pochi; il che non potendo egli fare per le ragioni dette di sopra, ne segue necessariamente che in pochissimo o in niun pregio sarebbe.<sup>23</sup>

As in his discussion on the differences between the sounds of the vernacular and of Latin, Attendolo once again presents two sets of competing poetic attitudes: the delightful poetry of the ear compared with the serious poetry of the mind; the contemporary multitudes that prefer romance as opposed to future *letterati* who will seek the enlightened severity of epic.

This distinction between *orecchio* and *intelletto* introduces a specifically modern problem, since at no point in the *Poetics* are there doubts about quality of sound, sweet or otherwise, as detrimental to an epic poem. As a result, the ideal epic form that emerges is also tied to the modern experience of classical epic poetry. What characteristics can be found in reading classical literature that suggest cultural longevity? Yet, as is clear from the use of Virgil’s language as an example, these characteristics are not entirely intellectual in character. Indeed, Attendolo appears to suggest that vernacular epic should sound, quite literally, like classical Latin epic.

*Dolcezza* also ties Ariosto directly to the earlier comments made about the poetry of Dell’Uva and Bernardo Tasso, both mentioned as exemplifying a particularly sweet style. Yet, as we have seen, it is not merely a question of choosing to follow Aristotle or choosing to please the masses. The condemnation of Trissino and Alamanni leads us to believe that beyond simply following the rules, one needs to address the problem of language. Vernacular *dolcezza*, or *languidezza*, must be addressed in order to bring the language closer to a Latinate sonority.

We find two parallel aesthetic domains running throughout the dialogue that are entirely absent from any Aristotelian framework. On the one hand, there is the current ver-

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<sup>23</sup> *Trattati*, III, pg. 343.

vernacular literary tradition, which contains successful examples of poetry such as Ariosto, Dell'Uva, and Bernardo Tasso and failures such as Trissino and Alamanni. However, even the successes are inscribed within a particular horizon, that of sweetness or languidness. On the other hand, true epic poetry, as exemplified by Tasso, which requires the use of particular stylistic transformations to produce sonority, gravitas, and majesty. These two strands also find symbolic expression in the earlier image of the trumpet and the lyre. Within the dialogue, it becomes clear that the trumpet—emblem of true epic poetry—can only be assigned to Tasso. The other poets, including Dell'Uva, Bernardo Tasso, and Ariosto, all remain inscribed within the domain of the lyre.

As with the claim that Tasso is the first epic poet, this explicit reorganization of large swaths of previous vernacular poets appears rather polemical. Indeed, despite attempts made by the volume's editor to temper the controversial nature of the work, Pellegrino's dialogue immediately drew the ire of the newly formed Accademia della Crusca in Florence.<sup>24</sup> The Crusca's founding principle was to purify and preserve a cultivated Tuscan literary language, and their first institutional act was to attack Pellegrino's work.<sup>25</sup> They published a point-by-point response, focusing primarily on Pellegrino's interpretations of the *Poetics*.<sup>26</sup>

Faced with this open declaration of intellectual war, Pellegrino himself offered a similarly meticulous *Replica* published later that year. In defense of his discussion on the potential impossibility of vernacular epic, Pellegrino offers the names of three important writers, Giovambattista Pigna (1530-1575), Girolamo Muzio (1496-1576), and Claudio Tolomei (1492-1556).<sup>27</sup> These three were important intellectual figures in northern Italy, and they published important works on both the status of the vernacular language as well as reflections on poetic form. Pigna, situated primarily in Ferrara, wrote a treatise

24 In his prefatory letter, the editor Scipione Ammirato praises the eloquence and the learning of the dialogue but hopes that the criticisms of Ariosto were merely an intellectual exercise: "Et mi giova anche tra me andarmi alcuna volta immaginando, o forse per dir meglio ingannandomi, che ciò habbian potuto ella fare più per esercitare le forze del loro ingegno, che perché portino una cotal credenza nell'animo" (c. liir). Regarding the Crusca, the first meeting concerning the rules and statutes of the academy occurred on January 25, 1583. See Arturo Tosi, "The Accademia della Crusca: Past and Present," in *Language Policy*, 10, 2011, pp. 289-303.

25 Their reply to Pellegrino's dialogue appeared that same year, *Difesa dell'Orlando Furioso* (1584). *Degli Accademici della Crusca difesa dell'Orlando Furioso dell'Ariosto. Contra 'l dialogo dell'epica poesia di Cammillo Pellegrino*. Florence: D. Manzani. For all citations, however, we will rely on the collection of responses from both the Crusca and Pellegrino, *Lo 'nfarinato secondo* (1588). *Lo 'nfarinato secondo: ovvero, dello 'nfarinato, Accademico della Crusca*. Florence: A. Padouani.

26 In the opening letter, one of the academics, Bastiano de' Rossi, writes that they are responding to "un dialogo, che a questi giorni mandò da Capua a stampar qui in Firenze Messer Cammillo Pellegrino" (*Lo 'nfarinato secondo*, cc. 2r-2v).

27 In reality, Pellegrino responds to the Crusca responding to the moment in the original dialogue when the character Attendolo comments that there exist some who doubt the capabilities of the vernacular. See *Lo 'nfarinato secondo*, pg. 345.

entitled *I romanzi* (1554) on the genre of the chivalric romance, theorizing its specifically modern qualities and its validity as a literary form. Muzio, an itinerant courtier, composed a large number of works on literature, including a verse treatise on poetry, *Arte poetica* (1551). Lastly, Tolomei, the oldest of the three, was one of the primary interlocutors in the debates on the status of the vernacular in the 1520s. He is also best known as the first theorist of transporting classical quantitative meter into the vernacular, the results of which can be found in a poetic anthology *Versi et regole della nuova poesia toscana* (1539).

Pellegrino first cites Pigna's treatise *I romanzi* (1554), which contains, after a lengthy theoretical discussion of romance, the first biography of Ariosto. Referring to this *Vita*, Pellegrino writes that Ariosto had consciously avoided writing an epic, since he realized that "la nostra lingua non comporta l'epica poesia."<sup>28</sup> By thus relying on the authority of Pigna, one of the chief defenders of the modern form of romance, Pellegrino is able to claim that Ariosto himself did not see his work as an epic.

After Pigna, Pellegrino cites Muzio's *Arte poetica* (1551), a vernacular verse treatise in the style of Horace's *Ars poetica*. This work offers a comprehensive description of vernacular poetry, including its various forms, metrical schemes, and model authors to imitate. Pellegrino quotes several lines from the third book, which deals explicitly with epic poetry and its absence in the vernacular:

Nè fin ad oggi a la tromba di Marte  
Post' ha la bocca alcun con pieno spirto.<sup>29</sup>

Pellegrino goes on to clarify, claiming that Muzio views the nature of the vernacular itself as the primary obstacle to the production of a real epic:

E questo mancamento, non tanto egli attribuisce a' poeti, quanto alla lingua,  
soggiugnendo nel medesimo luogo, che i versi Toscani:  
*Più son' atti a la lira, ch'a la tromba.*<sup>30</sup>

Once more the contrasting images of the trumpet and the lyre emerge as a way to organize symbolically vernacular literary production, where conventional forms are assigned the lyre, while the poetry of the trumpet remains to be written.

<sup>28</sup> *Lo 'nfarinato secondo*, pg. 345. In his biography, Pigna writes of Ariosto: "Egli anche cennò di voler Thoscana-mente darsi all'Epopeia [...] Ma a questo proponimento diede poi un diverso fine da quello che pensata s'havea, perciocché s'avide che la lingua nostra una tal poesia non comporta: non recando diletto in lei, ne riuscendo una materia continovata, senza che tre ragioni da principio riponemmo: le quali provano che più vero Epico essere non si possa." *Romanzi* (1554). *I romanzi di M. Giovan Battista Pigna*. Venice: Vincenzo Valgrisi, pg. 116.

<sup>29</sup> *Lo 'nfarinato secondo*, pg. 345.

<sup>30</sup> *Lo 'nfarinato secondo*, pg. 345.

After Muzio, Pellegrino writes that the members of the Crusca can learn more about the problems of producing epic in the vernacular by turning to Tolomei's metrical experimentation from the 1530s:

Si leggono molti discorsi di valenti huomini, sopra il trovato del verso esametro volgare, inventione di Claudio Tolomei, & dell'Academia Romana, ne' quali si disputa pro, & contra, se la lingua Toscana sia atta a sostenere il peso dell'eroica poesia.<sup>32</sup>

Tolomei was known throughout the sixteenth century as the first poet to experiment with the creation of quantitative meter in the vernacular; that is, a metrical structure based on the rules of classical languages.<sup>33</sup> In terms of Pellegrino's argument, Tolomei represents a much earlier attempt to mould a fundamental feature of the vernacular, its meter, in order to explore the very possibility of epic poetry.

Pellegrino's discussion of the epic question thus sets itself within a series of texts and authors spanning the length of the sixteenth century, from the 1530s to 1550s, that all point to a general problem: how should a poet write in a genre that has already been theorized, and exemplified, by another language? That is, how should a poet write a proper classical epic in a vernacular language traditionally used for lyric poetry and whose chief models are Petrarch and Ariosto?<sup>34</sup> Such questions inevitably open up onto further concerns

<sup>31</sup> In reality, Muzio is much more in line with Pellegrino's own thinking, namely, that the lack of epic is due not to native qualities of the vernacular, but rather to the choices and customs of vernacular poets. In the section following the lines cited by Pellegrino, Muzio targets those poets who continue to seek to please certain audiences rather than attempt to develop new methods for singing of war: "E chiunque de' nostri al suon de l'arme | Volto ha la mente, parmi essere intento | Al diletta le femine e la plebe." See *Rime diverse del Mutio Iustinopolitano*. Venice: Gabriel Giolito de' Ferrari e Fratelli, 1551. His *Arte poetica* can be found on cc. 63r – 94v. The section cited by Pellegrino appears on c. 74r. Thus, in addition to linguistic questions (vowels vs. consonants), or poetic concerns of theme and genre (love vs. war; lyric vs. epic), there are also socio-cultural concerns of the proper audience: women and commoners as opposed to the literary elite. Such a distinction mirrors Pellegrino's own criticism of Ariosto, whose sweetness may please the ears of the multitude today, but whose overall poetic structure lacks the qualities necessary for lasting cultural success. These issues will be addressed later, primarily in chapters 4-5.

<sup>32</sup> *Lo 'nfarinato secondo*, pg. 345.

<sup>33</sup> On the subject of heroic poetry, there are no extant texts by Tolomei or others from the Accademia Romana, so Pellegrino's reference is unclear; however, in 1539, an anthology of lyric poetry was published in Rome that contained not only examples of quantitative poetry, but also a set of rules, *Versi, et regole de la nuova poesia toscana*, 1539. A modern transcription can be found in Daniele Pettinari (2013). «Per una rilettura dei "Versi et regole de la nuova poesia toscana." Questioni ecdotiche, metriche e storico-letterarie.» Dissertation. Università di Roma, La Sapienza. URL: <http://padis.uniroma1.it/handle/10805/2068>.

<sup>34</sup> Pellegrino, in his reply to the Crusca, will eventually state definitely that certain languages are more naturally inclined towards specific themes: "La Toscana lingua [è] attissima ad esprimere i concetti d'amore [...] la lingua Latina, per se stessa [è] attissima alla grandezza Eroica [...] Però non è gran fatto, che una lingua habbia attitudine, & dispositione, più a trattar una cosa che un'altra, sì come la Caldea, & Ebreja è più d'ogni altra attissima, non che a trattare, ma etiandio nelle sue dittioni, & note a chiudere i divini misteri della sopranatural Theologia" (*Lo 'nfarinato secondo*, pg. 348).

about the nature of a language, its literary history, and its available—that is, culturally sanctioned—modes of expression.

This brief excursion into the Tasso-Ariosto controversy introduces a range of linguistic issues and cultural anxieties about the status of the vernacular in relation to classical languages. In Pellegrino's claim that Tasso is the first vernacular epic poet, we find evidence of a preoccupation with more than simply reinterpreting Aristotelian taxonomies. His major concern is to elevate the Italian language by identifying a model for expanding the range of expressive possibilities beyond the perceived limitations of Ariosto and lyrical poetry. In this view, Tasso's poem exemplifies not only a more orthodox Aristotelian structure, but also a particular way of using language that fulfills certain aesthetic expectations that had been left unsatisfied by previous authors. The resulting polemic in the 1580s thus focuses on establishing the appropriate criteria for judging an epic specifically in the vernacular, not only as an abstract genre, but as a particular use of language that is productive of a specifically epic sound.

Yet Pellegrino also points backward to earlier sixteenth century writers such as Tolomei and Pigna, suggesting that these issues are not merely the product of this specific debate, but part of a continuing discourse. With these other writers, it is also clear that a crucial issue is the vernacular language itself. Although the earlier texts are available to Pellegrino, we might ask to what extent these issues of epic language circulated in the first half of the sixteenth century. Were writers like Tolomei and Muzio in direct contact with each other? If Pellegrino offers such practical solutions to vernacular "sweetness," like vowel collision, what approaches emerge in the preceding decades? Is Pellegrino merely relying on the terms and problems of an earlier conversation?

This dissertation seeks to trace the origins and development of the discourse on the epic question, beginning in the early decades of the sixteenth century up to Tasso's own theorization and implementation of epic in the 1560s. However we are not concerned with accounting for early modern theories of genre codification, or even genres as such as a conceptual problem. Instead, we are interested more in the problem, as articulated by sixteenth century writers, of producing a vernacular epic in imitation of classical forms.

Most modern scholarship on the discourse of early modern epic theory focuses on the relationship between sixteenth century writers and classical theories, such as Horace and Aristotle. Indeed, general overviews of literary theory and criticism in Renaissance Italy tend to rely exclusively on accounts of the early modern interpretation of classical ideas. As a result, notions of "epic" tend to be absorbed into broader narratives of theoretical

“system building,” which are largely unconcerned with the practical issues facing epic poets in the sixteenth century.

For example, in Anglophone scholarship, this approach emerges at the turn of the twentieth century with Joel Elias Spingarn’s *A History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance* (1899). Spingarn himself writes in the introduction:

It was at this epoch that modern criticism began, and that the ancient ideals of art seemed once more to sway the minds of men; so that the history of sixteenth-century criticism must of necessity include a study of the beginnings of critical activity in modern Europe of the gradual introduction of the Aristotelian canons into modern literature.<sup>35</sup>

For Spingarn, describing the development of literary and artistic criticism — concepts which undergo little reflection — requires an account of the re-emergence of Aristotelian categories within European thinking about literature. More specifically, Aristotle’s discussion of tragedy and epic becomes the origin of a fixed, systematic approach to literature. In Spingarn’s view, this rapid consolidation of literary “rules” can serve as a useful approach for early modern periodization:

In the Renaissance itself, the humanistic period, with its ideal of classical imitation, was followed by a period of theorizing along the lines of the Aristotelian *Poetics*, and the results were before long hardened into fixed rules and dogmas of criticism.<sup>36</sup>

Yet Spingarn is ultimately less interested in “criticism” as such, focusing more on divining the “general spirit” of the early modern period. He puts forward the questions: “How did the classic spirit arise? Whence did it come, and how did it develop? What was the origin of the principles and precepts of neo-classicism?”<sup>37</sup>

Following on Spingarn’s work—and approach—was the monumental *History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance* (1961) by Bernard Weinberg. Indeed, Weinberg himself in 1963 provided the introduction to a reprinting of Spingarn’s study.<sup>38</sup> Weinberg’s two-volume investigation of literary theory and criticism of the sixteenth century largely follows on Spingarn’s general approach; however, Weinberg has also drastically widened the amount of material taken into consideration, including a large number of previously unknown manuscripts.

<sup>35</sup> Joel Elias Spingarn (1899). *A History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance: with special reference to the influence of Italy in the formation and development of modern classicism*. New York: Published for the Columbia University Press by Macmillan, pg. v.

<sup>36</sup> Spingarn, *History*, pg. 329.

<sup>37</sup> Spingarn, *History*, pg. vi.

<sup>38</sup> See J.E. Spingarn, *A history of literary criticism in the Renaissance, with a new introduction by Bernard Weinberg*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963.

Yet rather than seek to uncover the “spirit” of the age, Weinberg’s work aims to produce a broad overview of sixteenth century theories of literature. As he writes in the introduction, “I have not sought to follow any author through his career or any term or concept through the century. Instead, I have tried to distinguish the main intellectual traditions of the century as they relate to literary criticism.”<sup>39</sup> Unlike Spingarn, Weinberg does divide his work into two areas of emphasis, “theory” and “criticism,” where the former refers to general speculation about the features of literature while the latter involves debates about actual vernacular poetry. As a result, the first volume is divided up into analyzing concepts drawn from Horace, Plato, and Aristotle, while the second volume analyzes critical debates and the differing positions taken on these same categories. Despite attending to more “practical” issues, Weinberg’s analysis of criticism relies on the “close reading” of the strictly philosophical position of various authors, with an emphasis on the interpretation of classical categories.

Baxter Hathaway’s *The Age of Criticism: The Late Renaissance in Italy* (1962) follows closely on the heels of Weinberg’s work.<sup>40</sup> His approach is much less comprehensive, and the number of authors he considers is drastically reduced. He also focuses on the development of specifically classical concepts, dividing the work into an exploration of “imitation,” “universals and particulars,” “catharsis,” “imagination,” and “poetic furor.”

Like Weinberg, Hathaway is largely focused on the problem of reconstructing a “system” of thought. Yet, he is also more aware of time and place. For instance, he traces the development of one idea across a single author’s oeuvre. He also attends to details such as the fact that the majority of the thinkers under consideration are all strongly connected with Padua.<sup>41</sup> Unfortunately, he does not explore the different ways that these critics define themselves in relation to other groups, or cities, other habits of thought.

More recent work in English tends to follow this general emphasis on describing early modern “poetics,” understood as an emergent discipline with its own attendant coherent system of categories taken from, among others, Horace, Plato, and Aristotle. For example, *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance* (1999), in a section dedicated to “emerging discourses of poetics” offers three chapters divided according to the early modern adoption of Aristotle, Horace, and Latin rhetoric based on Cicero and Quintilian. The goal is largely that of establishing conceptual and intellectual continuities between Antiquity and the Renaissance.

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<sup>39</sup> *History of Literary Criticism*, pg. viii.

<sup>40</sup> Baxter Hathaway (1962). *The Age of Criticism: The Late Renaissance in Italy*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

<sup>41</sup> See *Age of Criticism*, pg. 306.



In his separate chapter on the use of Aristotle in sixteenth-century Italy, Daniel Javitch *does* challenge the narrative offered by Weinberg and others, whereby Aristotle's *Poetics* becomes the source and occasion for a renewed in literary criticism.<sup>42</sup> As he writes, the *Poetics* "had a discernible, and in some cases, even a decisive impact on early genre theory. That, however, does not mean that it was responsible for the genesis of such theory."<sup>43</sup>

Nevertheless, for Javitch, the issue remains one of understanding the ways in which early modern writers attempted to build a "more comprehensive genre theory."<sup>44</sup> As a result, he focuses on "the modification of Aristotle's principles to accommodate modern needs." He thus analyzes the reasons for which authors, like Giambattista Giraldi Cinzio, begin to theorize about specifically vernacular versions of tragedy and romance.<sup>45</sup> His focus, however, is largely on early modern discussions of plot, such as the presence of "happy endings" or strange implementations of Aristotelian "recognitions." In other words, his emphasis lies on classical categories of narrative content and sequence, which have little to say about the specificity of the vernacular language and the more practical problems facing vernacular poets.

In another essay from the same volume on Italian epic theory, Javitch states more explicitly that his object of analysis is "sixteenth-century codifications of epic theory" and "Italian codifiers."<sup>46</sup> He continues to focus on early modern discussions of narrative structure. Although he does mention the attempts to imitate classical hexameter, it is merely to state that *ottava rima* became the *de facto* meter for heroic poetry. Moreover, his essay focuses on a limited number of early modern thinkers and texts: Trissino, Tasso, Antonio Minturno's *L'arte poetica* (1564), Pellegrino's *Il Carrafa* (1584), and lastly Giason Denores' *Poetica* (1588). Apart from Trissino, these texts all fall well within the second half of the sixteenth century, which is to say, after a significant number of attempts at epic poetry have been made.

Most of the recent scholarship in Italy tends to follow a similar approach to describing sixteenth century debates over proper epic form. Stefano Jossa's study *La fondazione di un genere* (2002) is dedicated exclusively to the issue of epic theory. Yet much like the previously mentioned Anglophone scholarship, his goal is to account for a "system,"

<sup>42</sup> Daniel Javitch (1999b). «The assimilation of Aristotle's *Poetics* in sixteenth-century Italy.» In: *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, Vol. 3: *The Renaissance*. Ed. by Glyn P. Norton. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 53–65.

<sup>43</sup> *Cambridge History*, pg. 59.

<sup>44</sup> *Cambridge History*, pg. 60.

<sup>45</sup> *Cambridge History*, pg. 62.

<sup>46</sup> See Daniel Javitch (1999a). «Italian Epic Theory.» In: *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, Vol. 3: *The Renaissance*. Ed. by Glyn P. Norton. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 205–15, pg. 206.

more specifically “il sistema del poema nel Cinquecento, in termini di *tipologia della cultura*.”<sup>47</sup> Although his approach relies on the analysis of actual sixteenth century poems, it is mainly in the name of establishing a “codice epico.” As he himself claims, “La ricostruzione di un quadro è dunque ciò che punterà questo libro: non una storia opera per opera, poema per poema, ma l’individuazione di alcuni degli elementi fondanti su cui viene edificato la *forma* del poema alla metà del Cinquecento.”<sup>48</sup> In other words, despite an overall literary analysis, Jossa seeks to establish a rigid and coherent genre within the sixteenth century.

Yet the features taken into consideration are largely the same ones seen in the *Poetics* and in early scholarly accounts of Renaissance systems of thought. The primary issues are those of narrative structure, the identity of the protagonist, and the relationship between history and poetry. Indeed, in the introduction of his study, Jossa concludes by claiming that epic poems in the sixteenth century are failures due to their inability to reproduce the “invenzione fantastica” and the “macchina narrativa” of the *Orlando furioso*:

ciò che i poemi di metà Cinquecento infine rivelano è proprio una difficoltà a raccontare, senza quei meccanismi del fantastico e dell’imprevisto, dell’ interruzione e della ripresa, dell’attesa e della sorpresa, che avevano e faranno la fortuna dell’*Orlando furioso* non solo presso il pubblico contemporaneo, ma soprattutto nel moderno.<sup>49</sup>

Regardless of the potential veracity of this judgment, such an emphasis on narrative sequence still falls short of a fuller description of the anxieties facing early modern writers. As should be clear from looking at Pellegrino’s statements, analyzing the issue of vernacular epic requires a more robust description of problems of language and sound.

The historiographical emphasis on “system of genres,” together with the priority of “narrative structure” as a mode of formal differentiation, also appears in the more recent *Il Rinascimento* (2016), co-written by Giancarlo Alfano, Claudio Gigante, and Emilio Russo. This comprehensive literary history of sixteenth century Italy begins by stating, as its methodological paradigm, that the Cinquecento represents a decisive turning point in “modi della scrittura”:

[questa] svolta si determina attraverso la definizione dell’italiano letterario e la fondazione di un sistema dei generi, scandito su base aristotelica, legato a istanze retoriche e poetiche, ma anche sociali.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Jossa, *Fondazione di un genere*, pg. 15, italics in the original.

<sup>48</sup> Jossa, *Fondazione di un genere*, pg. 16.

<sup>49</sup> Jossa, *Fondazione di un genere*, pg. 16.

<sup>50</sup> Giancarlo Alfano, Claudio Gigante, and Emilio Russo (2016a). *Il Rinascimento*. Rome: Salerno Editrice, pg. 10.

Despite acknowledging the relationship between poetry, rhetoric, and the social, the approach remains primarily focused on the importance of Aristotle's *Poetics* in the distinction between different types of narrative sequences.<sup>51</sup>

Yet this study also situates the early modern focus on taxonomy within the larger debate of the language question. Unlike in most previous scholarship, *Il Rinascimento* traces a direct line between the search for norms and models in the *questione della lingua* to the debates over literary form later in the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, much of the work's focus remains on concepts from the *Poetics* that interest early commentators, such as Francesco Robortello and Vincenzo Maggi, starting in the late 1540s, matters such as the difference between history and poetry, the unity of time, and so forth. In other words, issue of a practical nature—which is to say, linguistic and stylistic issues—are set aside in favor of the conventional discussion of narrative:

L'evoluzione del poema in ottave, dal cavalleresco (o "romanzo") all'eroico, segna infine una tappa ulteriore della ristrutturazione dei generi letterari. [...] Il mondo cavalleresco diviene piuttosto una riserva di situazioni narrative largamente sfruttate dai nuovi tipi di narrazione eroica che prendono forma negli anni in cui si sviluppa la discussione intorno alla *Poetica*.<sup>52</sup>

Such an approach is crucial to our understanding of sixteenth century conceptions of literary form. Yet it also seems that, in order to construct a more integral account of this moment in literary history, it is necessary to consider the problem of epic *not* as a debate concerning narrative structure following on the heels of the *questione della lingua*. Instead, the matter of composing a vernacular epic is itself another side of the language question.

Classical theorization of genre no doubt plays a role in early modern thinking about literature, and texts such as the *Poetics* and *Ars poetica* clearly mediate sixteenth century understanding of classical models. Nevertheless, such texts offer little in the way of practical guidelines for the actual production of genres in the vernacular. Indeed, it is precisely because classical treatises on poetry are directed to the classification of forms that they fail to provide guidelines for composing in a modern language. In other words, theoretical sophistication and classical erudition are no guarantee that a vernacular poet will manage to produce an epic poem. As we saw in Pellegrino's texts, there is an inevitable tension involved in composing a work modelled in classical literature in a language with its own specific aesthetic character.

<sup>51</sup> "Ed è proprio nell'ambito dei poemi che è possibile ritrovare un altro aspetto decisivo per definire il carattere "rinascimentale" del Cinquecento. E' il caso della rivoluzione nel campo narrativo realizzata da Ariosto e poi da Tasso, veri antesignani — si pensi per l'uno al romanzo umoristico, per l'altro al romanzo storico — del genere con cui oggi si designa la narrazione lunga in prosa." *Rinascimento*, pg. 11.

<sup>52</sup> *Il Rinascimento*, pg. 82.

Although our study will look at many of the same authors analyzed by previous scholars from Weinberg to Jossa, we will shift our attention to a new set of questions. If a vernacular poet wishes to imitate a Greco-Roman model, what features does he attend to while describing his compositional process? What strategies does he prefer? If a vernacular poem is actually produced, what kinds of aesthetic judgments are made?

The epic project in sixteenth-century Italy is a shared endeavor, although the community of writers possesses a wide range of interests, values, and affiliations. Rather than locate abstract “systems of thought,” we seek to outline “structures of feeling,” to borrow a term from Raymond Williams. Attention to such structures, or what we could alternatively call “sensibilities,” entails describing the ways in which different authors employ “particular linkages, particular emphases and suppressions, and, in what are often its most recognizable forms, particular deep starting-points and conclusions.”<sup>53</sup> As Williams describes it, “we are concerned with meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt.”<sup>54</sup>

Seeking to describe a structure of feeling necessarily thus requires keeping in mind the different levels of experience of the authors under consideration. Statements concerning epic not only depend on other texts and authors, but also preferences, judgments, and identities shaped by geography, institutions, and social position. As a result, another aspect of our task in investigating accounts of epic is to uncover the “complex relation of differentiated structures of feeling to differentiated classes.”<sup>55</sup> In other words, the various authors under consideration, constrained in different ways by their given situation, present differing accounts of their experience with, and expectations of, vernacular epic poetry. Often these distinctions emerge through shifts in attention and emphasis, despite the apparent use of similar vocabulary and concepts.

We will attempt to establish the common set of sensibilities and values shared by various groups of people. This project will therefore attempt to situate various individual authors in their social and economic worlds and amidst their shifting relationships and

53 Raymond Williams (1977). *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pg. 134. See the entire chapter dedicated to structures of feeling, pp. 128-135.

54 *Marxism and Literature*, pg. 132.

55 *Marxism and Literature*, pg. 134. Williams also notes that it is specifically in art and literature that we can begin to make sense of a given culture, “[A]s a matter of cultural theory this is a way of defining forms and conventions in art and literature as inalienable elements of a social material process: not by derivation from other social forms and pre-forms, but as social formation of a specific kind which may in turn be seen as the articulation (often the only fully available articulation) of structures of feeling which as living processes are much more widely experienced.” *Marxism and Literature*, pg. 133. For a recent anthology analyzing this concept and extending it to the more general field of “affectivity” in cultural studies, see D. Sharma and F. Tygstrup, eds. (2015). *Structures of Feeling: Affectivity and the Study of Culture*. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter.

intellectual circumstances which produce a wide array of values, preferences, and modes of appreciation.

It must also be stated that we will presuppose a certain kind of “coming to consciousness” in the early sixteenth century of vernacular writers who saw before them the task of acquiring prestige for the vernacular through imitating classical models, specifically epic poetry. These writers experimented with different linguistic and artistic tools, took different approaches, and articulated the epic question in many different ways. Distinguishing a systematic theory of genres does not offer a useful starting point for our making sense of such sixteenth century experimentations. Indeed, by its very nature, “system” or “genre” are terms that imply a certain cohesiveness or stability over time. The vernacular writers analyzed throughout this study, however, find themselves in a much more dynamic situation, attempting to make sense of the relationship between the already fluid vernacular language and classical models.

Methodologically speaking, it is worth clarifying that no one specific method is employed in this dissertation. Despite the reference to the specific concept of structures of feeling, we will not rely on Williams’ formal vocabulary to explain the sixteenth-century epic project. For our current purposes, his framework merely serves as a possible alternative to certain scholastic tendencies, mentioned earlier, to inscribe sixteenth century authors within rationalist systematic thinking.

Apart from Williams, two other modern writers have proved useful for thinking through the analysis of the material under consideration, the unlikely pair of Giancarlo Mazzacurati and Bruno Latour. Mazzacurati’s oeuvre is fundamental to my own view of the sixteenth century. His body of work focuses almost entirely on the problem of describing the various conflicting cultures within Renaissance society.

For instance, in Mazzacurati’s view and in contrast to earlier scholars like Spingarn, there was no monolithic approach to classicism in the sixteenth century.<sup>56</sup> Instead, there were different positions vying for supremacy in a field of struggle. This struggle ought to be seen as largely ideological: writers such as Bembo and Trissino, though both dedicated to the elevation of the vernacular through imitation of classical works approached the problem from vastly different positions. In his works, such struggles were largely dialectical, in the sense that, with the emergence of any dominant cultural mode, a reaction against that ideology would necessarily follow, though often incorporating elements of that negative model.

<sup>56</sup> See, for instance, Giancarlo Mazzacurati, *Conflitti di culture nel Cinquecento*. Naples: Liguori, 1977; *idem*, *Misure del classicismo rinascimentale*. Naples: Liguori, 1990; *idem*, *Rinascimenti in transito*. Rome: Bulzino, 1996.

In the course of this study, we will refrain from identifying dominant and reactionary modes, due primarily to the nascent stage of the research. Instead, we will set about tracing the discourse that emerges when various actors set themselves against other others in an attempt to assert their own position. As a result of this emphasis on description, my approach has more in common with more recent work in the field of social history than conventional literary history. Indeed, if I were to locate any particularly resonant theoretical approach it would be that of Bruno Latour, at least the one put forward in his work *Reassembling the Social*.<sup>57</sup> As Latour frames it, the task of a researcher confronted with an indeterminate social formation is to follow the actors themselves, allowing them define their boundaries and articulate their own values.

As Latour himself emphasizes, controversies thus offer the most fruitful area of observation, as actors constantly need to identify themselves and their enemies when accounting for their own positions. Indeed, Latour remarks that a more careful approach to the description of social formations should “learn how to feed off uncertainties, instead of deciding in advance what the furniture of the world should look like.”<sup>58</sup>

This dissertation is thus the description of a particular discourse. Yet this terminology also risks conjuring up the idea of adhering to another specific methodology. Here, instead, “discourse” should be understood in a general, unprogrammable way. With this investigation, we are bringing together for analysis a diverse and dispersed set of statements about the problem of epic. This project will therefore trace the development of the specific discourse of the vernacular epic question beginning in the 1530s up to the period of Tasso’s composition of the *Liberata* in the 1560s and 1570s. Despite the fact that these questions of epic language appear in texts that have already been discussed in modern scholarship, we will not concern ourselves with looking at interpretations of the *Poetics*. Instead, we will pose the following two questions: first, how do these writers address the problem of classical epic in the vernacular; that is, as a problem of language? Secondly, and more specifically to our understanding of Tasso’s theorization of epic form, how do writers propose solutions to the problem of epic? Is it through technical or stylistic innovation or by changing the available models and looking at non-canonical sources?

At stake is a shift in our focus regarding the study of genre in early modern literary theory. Italian thinkers in particular are not entirely absorbed in interpretations of Aristotle—or Horace for that matter. Instead, being unable to rely entirely on classical frameworks for theorizing their own language, these authors must navigate the creation of a new

<sup>57</sup> See *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

<sup>58</sup> *Reassembling the Social*, pg. 115.

critical vocabulary and the pressures of changing tastes, whether in the academy, the university, or the court. By investigating the problem of epic in the vernacular, we will thus gain insight into a little-studied aspect of sixteenth century discussions on literary form, as well as the social and historical conditions for the production of Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*.

The field is large, and doubtless there are many more authors addressing these concerns than those analyzed in this study. However, the following chapters are the beginning of a broader attempt to make sense of the problems facing vernacular writers who saw themselves as recovering classical forms such as epic. The authors analyzed are merely a set of examples that best demonstrate a series of questions that emerged throughout the sixteenth century.

## 2.1 BERNARDINO DANIELLO AND “TERZA RIMA”

In order to contextualize debates about the possibility of classical epic in the vernacular, we must constantly keep in view the linguistic world of sixteenth century Italy.<sup>1</sup> For all of the authors under examination, different languages exist as simultaneous possibilities for both practical and artistic communication: for example, a domestic spoken language which varies according to region and socio-economic status; Latin (and Greek, to a lesser extent), cultivated by an educated class of intellectuals; and an ideal metaregional literary language, under constant development from (often competing) intellectual positions.<sup>2</sup> On the one hand, the dynamic of this multilingual situation allows for a broader horizon of possible types of literature, such as dialectal or macaronic.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, and principally among more conservative authors, this same linguistic permeability also produces highly rarefied criteria for judging acceptable literary works, which may receive censure for neologisms, Latinisms, or dialectal inflections.<sup>4</sup> The indeterminacy of this linguistic world thus engenders dispositions of both experimentation and consolidation, both of

1 For a general description of the language debate, see Maurizio Vitale (1967). *La questione della lingua*. Palermo: Palumbo, and more recently, Giuseppe Antonelli and Marcello Ravesi (2010). «La questione della lingua nel Cinquecento.» In: *Atlante della letteratura italiana*. Ed. by Sergio Luzzato and Gabriele Pedullà. Turin: Einaudi, pp. 739–749.

2 Sperone Speroni offers perhaps the clearest example of these competing languages. His *Dialogo delle lingue* (1542) argues for the possibility of using the vernacular, rather than classical languages to discuss philosophical matters. Moreover, in his later debate over his tragedy the *Canace*, he acknowledges speaking in a specifically Padovan-accented language, despite discussing “Tuscan verses.”: “dovendone parlare in questa mia lingua padovana, lingua, per dire il vero, rozza e barbara come sono tutte le lombarde... [...] Ma il parlar de’ versi toscani in altra lingua che la toscana par una strania divisa e un stranio mescolamento di accenti e pronunzie.” See Sperone Speroni and Giambattista Giraldis Cinzio (1982). *Canace, e scritti in sua difesa: Giudizio ed epistola latina*. Ed. by Christina Roaf. Bologna: Commissione per i testi di lingua, pg. 257. For a more general discussion of competing claims on the dominant language and culture vision, see Giancarlo Mazzacurati (1977). *Conflitti di culture nel Cinquecento*. Naples: Liguori.

3 The most well-known examples would be Angelo Beolco (“Ruzante”) (1502–1542) and Teofilo Folengo (1491–1544). For a recent description with relevant bibliography, see Giancarlo Alfano, Claudio Gigante, and Emilio Russo (2016b). *Il Rinascimento: Un’introduzione al Cinquecento letterario italiano*. Rome: Salerno Editrice, pp. 34–38.

4 The distinctions between these three forms will become especially clear in the Crusca’s purist attack on Tasso, where he is accused, among other things, of implying Latinisms and “Lombardisms.” For a description of this particular strain of linguistic purity see Giancarlo Mazzacurati (1965). *La questione della lingua dal Bembo all’Accademia fiorentina*. Napoli: Liguori.



which justify themselves in the name of acquiring greater cultural capital for a shared, modern vernacular distinct from classical languages.

Making sense of conceptions of epic should therefore not consist exclusively in the analysis of different genres, or even “genre” as such. Instead, the issue of epic should begin with a description of the cultural and intellectual conditions which determine the field of possible literary forms, forms which are never given automatically but develop historically as a result of the continuing confrontation among languages. In particular, when we refer to the “vernacular epic” in sixteenth century Italy, we must first necessarily pose the question, “which vernacular?”

Answering this question requires turning for a moment to the first decades of the sixteenth century, to the intense debate known as the *questione della lingua*, which was directed at determining the precise identity of the literary vernacular to be used by all Italian writers. Various positions exist, such as archaic Tuscan, contemporary Florentine, an erudite national “Italian” language, or a mixture of diverse contemporary courtly idioms. The position that ultimately emerges as dominant is that of Pietro Bembo, whose dialogue *Prose della volgar lingua* (1525), establishes the foundation for a lasting literary language.<sup>5</sup>

Bembo emphasizes three essential qualities of this literary language: first, it must be a morphologically stable form of writing, as opposed to the amorphous and regional character of daily speech; second, it must be based on the best writers in poetry and prose, for which he chooses Petrarch and Boccaccio; lastly, the language must be aesthetically pleasing, which is to say, it must satisfy specific formal criteria.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the fact that Bembo emphasizes the adoption of a long-lasting, historically developed, and aesthetically appealing language, his models were still relatively archaic for early sixteenth century authors due to a reliance on authors from the Trecento. Yet for Bembo, the transhistorical character of such a choice guarantees the longevity of a national literary culture, as the language must be studied through grammar and rhetoric,

<sup>5</sup> For various descriptions of the process of standardization, see, among others, Vitali's *Questione della lingua*; Carlo Dionisotti (1967). *Geografia e storia della letteratura italiana*. Turin: Einaudi, in particular the chapter “La letteratura italiana nell'età del concilio di Trento,” pp. 183-204; and Quondam on the development of standardized grammars in the Venetian typographical world: Amedeo Quondam (1978). «Nascita della grammatica. Appunti e materiali per una descrizione analitica.» In: *Quaderni storici* 13, pp. 555-592; and Amedeo Quondam (1982). «La grammatica in tipografia.» In: *Le pouvoir et la plume. Incitation, contrôle et répression dans l'Italie du XVI siècle*. Paris: Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, pp. 177-192.

<sup>6</sup> In the *Prose*, we find Bembo's brother Carlo compare Bembo's choice of archaic Tuscan to ancient Greek writers who chose to write specifically in the Athenian dialect due to its more appealing aesthetic character, “più volentieri i loro componimenti in lingua attica distendeano che in altra, sì come in quella che è nel vero più vaga e più gentile.” See *Prose*, I 14. Carlo himself goes on to explain why archaic Tuscan is preferable to his own dialect due to the large number of pleasing features, all related to the sound of the language.

much like classical Latin. As such, this language stands in opposition to the regional, popular, and more mutable options found in the linguistic theories of the Florentines or of courtiers such as Baldassare Castiglione. From a pedagogical point of view, Bembo’s approach also provides future writers with both a stabilized grammar to follow, as well as very specific models to imitate. Yet it is precisely the question of models that sets the stage for new problems concerning the adoption of classical—that is, non-vernacular—literary genres.

Because Bembo chooses Petrarch for his poetic canon—excluding both Dante and any subsequent poets from the 15th century—, the available corpus of forms to imitate is tied to a limited range of formal options. In fact, Bembo’s project contains little room for the expansion of literary forms beyond those unique to the vernacular such as sonnets, *canzoni*, madrigals, and ballads. Moreover, Bembo derives criteria for determining literary value largely from adherence to a limited range of poetic formulae that are principally concerned with producing a harmonious sound.<sup>7</sup>

Within this horizon of a restricted number of poetic kinds, the question of epic emerges as especially problematic for some of Bembo’s followers, who wish to adhere to the idea of a canon of “good literature,” while also recognizing that there exist literary forms in Greco-Roman literature that have yet to find corresponding vernacular instantiations. One such follower is Bernardino Daniello (1500ca. - 1565), who offers the earliest example of dissatisfaction with Bembo’s cultural project due to its perceived lack of specifically classical genres. Daniello is also the first to offer, in printed form, a description of an emergent literary debate about the very possibility of an Italian epic.

### 2.1.1 *In the Shadow of Bembo*

Born in Lucca around 1500, Daniello relocated to Padua in the early 1530s and joins the group of *letterati* surrounding Trifone Gabriele (1470ca. - 1549), one of the principal supporters of Bembo’s project.<sup>8</sup> In 1536, Daniello published a dialogue entitled *Della poetica*, offering a comprehensive account of the principles of poetic composition derived almost

<sup>7</sup> The desire for a pleasant sounding yet symbolically authoritative language underlies Bembo’s entire project. As the character of his brother Carlo says in the *Prose*, it is due to the sound of the “Florentine tongue” that Bembo chose to write his own dialogue *Gli Asolani* in that language rather than his own native Venetian dialect, “più tosto in lingua fiorentina [...] che in quella della città sua.” See *Prose*, I 14.

<sup>8</sup> For Daniello’s biography, see M. Raffaella De Gramatica, “Daniello, Bernardino.” In: *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 32, 1986. Web. *Treccani*. Regarding Gabriele, Bembo sent him drafts of the *Prose della volgar lingua* as early as 1512. See Laura Fortini, “Gabriel, Trifone.” In: *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 51, 1998. Web. *Treccani*.

exclusively from the linguistic prescriptions found in Bembo's *Prose*.<sup>9</sup> In the preface to the dialogue, Daniello in fact praises the city of Venice for having produced Bembo, who has extended the limits of "la nostra volgare et natia lingua," thereby allowing for a richer and more noble literature.<sup>10</sup>

In an effort to develop Bembo's theoretical framework, Daniello goes on to associate his own dialogue with the treatises of Cicero and Horace, both of whom elevated the Latin language through their work. Daniello compares the current state of the vernacular to the early periods of the Latin, which was initially like a "tenera e fanciulla verga," before finally developing into a great and noble tree. Through his emulation of these classical theorists, he hopes that readers of his dialogue will find "se non tutti que' precetti, ammaestramenti o regole dell'arte del dire, almeno i principali e più necessari."<sup>11</sup>

Despite his adherence to Bembian principles, Daniello's vision of vernacular literary tradition differs radically from the one developed by the Venetian humanist. For Bembo, the culmination of literary quality was to be found in the fourteenth century with Petrarch and Boccaccio, after which came periods of decline and recovery. Daniello, on the other hand, views the language as only now beginning a process of mastery and perfection.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, he wonders when future writers will move beyond the narrow range of forms offered by Bembo's version of literary imitation:

chi sa che et essi ancora per aventura allo scrivere non solamente novelle, sonetti et amorse canzoni, ma più alti, più gravi e più gloriosi poemi, che questi non sono, non si diano? Il che se essi faranno, daranno eziandio a molti, che dopo loro verranno, materia e cagione di nuove osservazioni e nuove regole iscrivere, e più ampiamente ch'io fatto non avrò.<sup>13</sup>

According to Daniello, Bembo's cultural regime is merely the foundation upon which to build not only a larger, but also a more substantial body of literature, defined in terms of surpassing conventional vernacular genres. With this approach, he constructs a dialectic between literary forms that will prove to be central to understanding his view of epic poetry. In response to Boccaccian *novelle* and Petrarchan love poems, forms that constitute the basis of Bembo's literary project, he posits an indeterminate group of "più

<sup>9</sup> "Pertanto dico che niuno (a mio giudicio) fu, né è o fia già mai, di questo nome poeta vero e legittimo possessore se prima l'ingegno suo fertile non coltiverà con l'arte." See Bernard Weinberg (1970). *Trattati di poetica e retorica del Cinquecento*. Vol. 2. Bari: Laterza, I, pg. 231.

<sup>10</sup> "[Bembo] i suoi stretti termini [della nostra volgare et natia lingua] ampliando et allargando, le ha tanto di splendore e d'ornamento aggiunto, ch'ella ne può sicuramente ricca et superba andare." See *Trattati*, I, pg. 231.

<sup>11</sup> *Trattati*, I, pg. 232.

<sup>12</sup> For an extended discussion of these differing views of history and linguistic perfection, see Giancarlo Maz-zacurati (1990). *Misure del classicismo rinascimentale*. Naples: Liguori.

<sup>13</sup> *Trattati*, I, pg. 232.

alti, più gravi e più gloriosi poemi," which must ultimately surpass these earlier forms, leading to a more perfect canon of modern authors. The prefatory section does not attempt to clarify the form or content of such poems, and it is not until much later in the dialogue that we begin to have a clearer sense of things.

The aim of the dialogue, divided into two books, is to offer the principles for the correct composition of vernacular poetry. The principal interlocutors are Daniello himself and the aforementioned Trifone Gabriele, whose primary function is to expound on these various principles, which seem to be drawn largely from classical rhetoric. In fact, Horace's *Ars poetica* becomes the fundamental framework for developing concepts of technique, canon formation, and generic categorization. The first book even opens with one of the interlocutors brandishing a copy of the *Ars poetica*, setting the stage for the entire discussion on the establishment of poetic principles.<sup>14</sup> As a result, the entire dialogue relies on an explicitly classical rhetorical method for discussing artistic concepts, such as *ars* in contrast to *natura*, the combination of utility with pleasure, and the division of literary kinds according to theme.<sup>15</sup>

Following a general rhetorical framework, the discussion begins with an analysis of the subjects available to the vernacular poet ("le materie et i soggetti"). Gabriele lists a wide range of genres based on their theme: the private sphere for comedy, the ruin of great empires for tragedy, the martial deeds of great men for epic, and the praise of the gods and men for lyric. Lyric, a thematically rich form of poetry, also includes "l'amorose giovenili cure, i giuochi, i conviti e le feste," subjects which move well beyond typical Petrarch love poetry. Lastly, he mentions elegiac poetry, with its focus on lamentation, and pastoral, which sings of fields, forests, and flocks.<sup>16</sup> Rather than offer a systematic

14 "Venendomi per aventura nella destra mano di Messer Andrea veduto un libro, il quale egli di nascondere cercava, temendo non forse da me vedute fossero alcune annotazioni che nel margine di quello (sì com'io poi m'accorsi) erano, così verso lui rivolto a dire incominciai: «Cotesto, che libro è egli, Messer Andrea? Deh, se non vi è grave, lasciatemelo, vi prego, vedere». «Orazio», rispose egli; e datomelo e apertolo mi corse per aventura dinanzi agli occhi quel luogo della sua Poetica ov'ei dice: Fu prima questa sapienza, quella | Che dal privato il publico divide." *Trattati*, I, pg. 233.

15 The organizational principle of the dialogue itself follows a classical rhetorical scheme, beginning with invention before moving to *dispositio* and *elocutio*: "Lasciando, adunque, queste da parte stare e del poema in genere parlando, dico tre esser le cose principali dalle quali esso suo stato e suo esser prende: l'invenzione prima delle cose, o vogliam dire ritrovamento; la disposizione poi, o ver ordine di esse; e finalmente la forma dello scrivere ornatamente le già ritrovate e disposte, che (latinamente parlando) elocuzione si chiama e che noi volgare, leggiadro et ornato parlare chiameremo." *Trattati*, I, pg. 243.

16 "... le materie et i soggetti ponno esser molte e fra sé differenti (perciò che ad alcuni sì come a' comici sogliono esser materia le più famigliari e domestiche operazioni, per non dir basse e vili; a' tragici, le morti degli alti re e le ruine de' grandi imperi; agli eroici, i più eccelsi fatti degli imperatori e di altri uomini nell'armi magnanimi e valorosi, sì come quelli d'Achille e d'Ulisse furono ad Omero, a Virgilio d'Enea; ai lirici, le lode degli iddii e quelle degli uomini parimente, l'amorose giovenili cure, i giuochi, i conviti e le feste; altri hanno i pianti, i lamenti e le miserie, altri i campi, le selve, gli armenti, le gregge e le capanne.)" *Trattati*, I, pg. 249. This notion that lyric has virtually infinite possible topics appears later in Torquato Tasso's own poetic theory,

approach to the question of literary form, he seems to suggest that there are as many kinds of poetry as there are themes to address.

### 2.1.2 *Possibility of the Vernacular Epic*

Despite the exhaustive nature of this list, none of these forms undergoes further elaboration elsewhere in the first book, which instead focuses on structural concerns, such as the construction of believable characters. The second book turns to questions of language, and it is at the very end of the dialogue itself that we find a discussion of epic.<sup>17</sup>

In the midst of a broader discussion of rhyme, the character Daniello interrupts Gabriele's analysis of lyrical metrical forms in order to introduce the practical problem of composing an epic: "se per aventura mai mi cadesse nell'animo di comporre un poema eroico in questa volgar lingua, in che maniera di verso mi consigliereste voi ch'io scriver ne lo dovessi?"<sup>18</sup> Of immediate interest is the fact that Daniello's character takes the concept of epic poetry for granted as an immediately comprehensible type of poetry. In the first book, Gabriele had in fact listed the subject matter of heroic poetry as "i più eccelsi fatti degli imperatori e di altri uomini nell'armi magnanimi e valorosi."<sup>19</sup> In other words, by conceptualizing epic primarily within the sphere of themes, Daniello suggests that the genre is a universal category that exists outside of the specific nature of different languages. Yet what constitutes the formal qualities of this sort of poetry? The sudden appearance of epic within a section concerning rhyme is perhaps not a coincidence. Rhyme, in fact, is treated indiscriminately throughout the dialogue as an essential feature of vernacular poetry, with examples coming almost exclusively from Petrarch. Yet, these primarily lyrical metrical schemes appear problematic for the creation of epic poetry.

To address this issue, Daniello points out that there do not exist any epic models to imitate in the vernacular. Of all the poets in Italy, none has written heroic poetry, only son-

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"La materia del lirico non è determinata, perché, sí come l'oratore spazia per ogni materia a lui proposta con le sue ragioni probabili tratte da' luoghi comuni, così il lirico parimente tratta ogni materia che occorra a lui." See Torquato Tasso and Luigi Poma (1964). *Discorsi dell'arte poetica e del poema eroico*. Bari: Laterza, pg. 50.

<sup>17</sup> "Né basta ancora questo così fatto ritrovamento di materia, s'ella non si dispone e non s'ordina poi, e non si pulisce et orna somigliantemente con le più elette parole et artificiose, in maniera che non pure perfezione alcuna aggiugnere ma desiderar le si possa maggiore. E così, come quella statua od immagine gli occhi de' riguardanti in essa grandemente diletta, fa bisogno che questa scrittura o poema non solamente l'orecchie ma l'animo eziandio empia et appaghi de' leggenti o vero degli ascoltanti." *Trattati*, I, pp. 272-73.

<sup>18</sup> *Trattati*, I, pg. 314

<sup>19</sup> *Trattati*, I, pg. 249.

nets and *novelle* in imitation of Petrarch and Boccaccio.<sup>20</sup> Daniello’s character concludes, “Ma chi è egli colui che in questa [lingua] scrivendo si debba da’ nostri uomini imitare? Certo, se ben si considera, niuno.”<sup>21</sup> The initial dialectic of forms re-emerges: first, the prescribed and authorized forms of love poetry, followed by the more serious and elevated poetry of the future. While his earlier reference to “*novelle, sonetti, e amorose canzoni*” might be taken as a value-neutral statement, this description of the limited range of these forms is decidedly more negative in character. For Daniello, relying exclusively on Petrarchan forms—now associated with rhyme—becomes problematic when a poet wishes to emulate classical poetic models of Antiquity. The initially modest claims concerning the expansion of largely Bembian poetic principles has now led to a reconfiguration of the vernacular project. The aforementioned “*più alti, più gravi e più gloriosi poemi*” of the prefatory letter emerges as the specific problem for future poets to resolve.

Yet Daniello’s character recognizes that it may be possible to translate epic forms from Latin by following the method of Virgil, who provided Latin poets not only with examples of martial themes (“*l’arme e gli errori*”), but also a particularly elevated manner of writing: “*in così chiaro stile e così sublime cantò.*”<sup>22</sup> He thus continues to rely on a specifically Horatian understanding of poetry, according to which the quality of the mode of expression must correspond to the quality of the subject matter.<sup>23</sup> As a result, the issue is not one of finding epic subject matter, but locating a suitable style in the vernacular. The most immediate concern with developing such a suitable epic style comes from choosing the proper meter.<sup>24</sup>

Surprisingly, rather than first offer his own possible solutions, Daniello introduces two contemporary attempts at metrical experimentation, both of which he then firmly rejects:

insino a qui niuno si vede avere scritto poema il quale dirittamente si possa eroico chiamare, tutto che alcuni i versi d’undici sillabe composti e questi senza la rima abbino avuto ardimento di nominare eroico; et alcuni altri con

20 “[D]i tanti e così nobili ingegni quanti son quelli che non solamente nella vostra città, ma e nell’altre quasi tutte d’Italia, niuno ve ne ha che allo scrivere eroicamente si dia, ma solamente sonetti e capitoli e novelle.” *Trattati*, I, pg. 314.

21 *Trattati*, I, pg. 314

22 *Trattati*, I, pg. 314.

23 For a discussion of appropriateness, style, and the relationship between Horace and Aristotle via the intermediary Neoptolemus, see C.O. Brink (2011). “Neoptolemus and the Rhetoric and Poetics.” In: *Horace on Poetry: Prolegomena to the Literary Epistles*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 90–119.

24 Most likely this immediate concern with meter also derives from Horace, who focuses his division of genres according to both subject matter and meter. Although this aspect of a Horatian paradigm will be addressed, further research is necessary to determine early modern conceptions of literary genre according to metrical distinctions.

quella, ma sì lontana ponendola che il senso dell'udire comprendere né conoscer la puote.<sup>25</sup>

Although Daniello's dialogue is the first printed work to pose the question of vernacular epic, this reference to two unnamed attempts to reproduce classical heroic meter suggests that a debate on imitating classical forms in the vernacular had already begun by the mid 1530s. This statement offers both a sketch of available positions on the question of epic, as well as specific criteria for rejecting them. Although we will return to both of these rejected positions, it is important to note that Daniello is most likely referring to the blank verse theories expounded by Gian Giorgio Trissino and Luigi Alamanni, as well as the metrical experimentations of Claudio Tolomei and Bernardo Tasso. But first, let us explore the criteria by which Daniello rejects those other metrical options, together with his suggested alternative.

In Daniello's *Poetica*, the absolute priority for judging any vernacular poem lies with the ear, which ultimately determines the suitability of a style to a given subject matter. Rhyming becomes the *sine qua non* of vernacular poetry in general and epic poetry specifically. As we shall see, his character Gabriele will state quite explicitly, "a me pare che [...] non si debba quel verso eroico chiamare che è senza rima."<sup>26</sup> For Daniello, any attempt to remove or obfuscate this particular aesthetic character disqualifies a work from being considered as actual poetry, let alone epic poetry. Despite the introduction of epic as problematic within a discussion on lyrical rhyming, it is now apparent that rhyme is a necessary component for *all* vernacular forms. The question of selecting a proper epic verse form thus becomes essentially an issue of determining a suitable rhyme scheme.

### 2.1.3 *The Necessity of Rhyme*

After Daniello's persona sets up a series of specific issues concerning classical epic and vernacular rhyme, Gabriele steps in to offer a solution to the potential form that a vernacular epic might take, ultimately insisting on the use of *terza rima*. He begins, however, by shifting the discussion to an analysis of the differences between the vernacular and Latin. He first points out that Italian poets do not lack an abundance of proper subject matter for epic, especially since in modern times there are both wars and "i più

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<sup>25</sup> *Trattati*, I, pg. 314.

<sup>26</sup> *Trattati*, I, pg. 317.

grandi, grandi e sublimi fatti degli uomini."<sup>27</sup> He reiterates the problem as one of discovering proper expression in the vernacular. According to Gabriele, such concerns never existed for Latin poets, since the Latin language, by its nature, was "especially fortunate" ("spezialmente felicissima") in the representation of war. In fact, a Latin poet wishing to sing of "high and serious matters" ("alte ... e gravi cose") could easily turn to a similarly "grand and serious verse" ("alto verso e così grave").<sup>28</sup> In other words, a Latin poet was able to make use of dactylic hexameter, which, according to Gabriele, is the fundamental building block of classical epic poetry.<sup>29</sup>

Since the vernacular lacks both epic models and metrical options similar to dactylic hexameter, Gabriele first suggests reformulating the criteria for determining epic subject matter, expanding the category to include not only martial exploits but similarly sublime matters. By allowing for thematic flexibility, he goes on to say that the vernacular does in fact have models, namely Dante's *Commedia* and Petrarch's *Trionfi*: "[Dante e Petrarca], quantunque non togliessino a trattar affermatamente le battaglie di Enea e d'Acchille o di qual altro si voglia prode e valoroso guerriero, nientedimeno essi però gravissime et altissime cose trattarono."<sup>30</sup> According to Gabriele, since such vernacular works are thematically comparable in scope and grandeur to the heroic exploits found in Greco-Roman epic, their stylistic—and more importantly metrical—choices can now serve as an appropriate model for a new "gravissimo" and "altissimo" poem. The metrical scheme used by both poets, *terza rima*, therefore becomes the proper model to follow for future vernacular epic poets.

Having established a broader horizon of epic material and established an authorized metrical model, Gabriele elaborates on the concepts of "grave" and "alto," which had been employed vaguely up to this point. He begins, as the character of Daniello did earlier, by positioning himself against other positions on the matter. He anticipates critics condemning *terza rima* for lacking these two qualities:

<sup>27</sup> Poems about wars already existed in large numbers in the early two decades of the sixteenth century. They were typically performed in public spaces such as the piazza or street by professional entertainers. Although we will briefly address the topic in Chapter 3, a point to research further would be the relationship between these more popular works and the elite literary epic desired by the republic of letters. See Luca Degl'Innocenti (2016). «Paladins and Captains: Chivalric Clichés and Political Persuasion in Early Modern Italian War Poems.» In: *Interactions between Orality and Writing in Early Modern Italian Culture*. Oxon, New York: Routledge, pp. 31–47.

<sup>28</sup> *Trattati*, I, pg. 314

<sup>29</sup> More work is required to analyze early modern Latin discussions of dactylic hexameter, which is tied explicitly to epic poetry. In fact, it is normally referred to as "carmen heroicum," either in treatises or in verse translations. For example, in Calepino's dictionary we find: "Heroicus - ut heroica aetas, in qua heroes flouerunt. Et heroicus versus, quod eo genere carminis heroum gesta describantur." See *Ambrosii Calepini Dictionarium*. Lyon: Seb. Gryphium, 1546, fo. Q5v.

<sup>30</sup> *Trattati*, I, pg. 315.



Ma voi potreste forse a questo rispondermi e dire che le cose più sublimi devriano ancora in più sublime verso che possibile fosse cantarsi; il terzetto per la frequenza della rima scemar e levar più di gravità alla cosa quanto più pone e aggiugne di vaghezza e dolcezza; et oltre a ciò esser necessario che si chiuda in ogni tre versi la sentenza, come la chiudono in due i compositori delle elegie.<sup>31</sup>

The central issue continues to be the sense of sound, specifically the relationship between the harmony of vernacular rhymes and the aesthetic expectations of epic poetry in general. In opposition to *gravitas* is the same aesthetic character that we saw condemned by Tasso and Pellegrino in the previous chapter: sweetness (“dolcezza”).

Together with this concern about the potentially distracting or incongruous nature of rhyme in the creation of vernacular epic, there is also the apparent compositional issue of tying the unfolding of narrative material to the rigid structure of verse. In other words, a poet is required to anchor the movement of his ideas to the rhyme words, which may be acceptable for forms like elegy, but clearly not for a longer narrative poem. This last point bears emphasizing: at stake in this discussion is the identification of a proper narrative model for poetry, one which possesses specifically vernacular qualities while allowing for an unimpeded movement of narrative.<sup>32</sup>

In reality, Gabriele claims, a poet is not restricted to three lines and can continue (“continovare”) his thought across up to three tercets, a practice exemplified best by Dante.<sup>33</sup> After offering several examples from the *Commedia*, he concludes without much further analysis:

Vedete or voi quanto sia questo costruito lungo, e non toglie gravità alcuna o grandezza la rima. [...] Questo modo di cantar, adonque, in questo numero di versi ternarii, è senz’alcun dubbio il più eccellente et il più nobile, nel vero, che noi abbiamo, et oltre a ciò il più continovato.

Gabriele continues to stress the earlier two points. On the one hand, rhyme may or may not diminish the greatness of the subject matter. For him, *terza rima* does not. On the other hand, rhyme may or may not allow for narrative continuity. According to Gabriele, the tercet is, in fact, the “most continuous” (“il più continovato”).

<sup>31</sup> *Trattati*, I, pg. 315.

<sup>32</sup> In reality the notion of epic meter providing both *gravitas* and narrative continuity seems to come from early modern commentaries on Horace’s *Ars poetica*. Determining the source of these concepts is not crucial to the current argument, but future research will need to address the genesis of this critical vocabulary, which will be integrated into later commentaries on Aristotle’s *Poetics*, such as those of Francesco Robortello (1548) and Vincenzo Maggi (1550).

<sup>33</sup> “Al che vi rispondo e dico prima non essere sempre necessario terminar la sentenza in un terzetto, ma che essa si può continovare per lo spazio di duo e tallor di tre.” *Trattati*, I, pp. 315-16.

This tension between narrativity and rhyme further allows Gabriele to re-emphasize the specificity of vernacular poetry. Repeating Daniele’s earlier condemnation of blank verse, Gabriele concludes that rhyme is absolutely essential: “Perciò che a me pare che non solamente non si debba quel verso eroico chiamare che è senza rima, ma né verso ancora, e specialmente essendo la rima un’ armonia che il verso volgare ha di più che il latino.”<sup>34</sup> According to Gabriele, harmony ultimately distinguishes the vernacular from Latin, and any attempt to remove it from poetry is antithetical to the entire project of establishing an elevated literary canon in the vernacular.

The issue of harmonious sound continues to determine the specific character of the vernacular. In fact, Gabriele concludes his comparison of the two languages by suggesting that the poems of Petrarch and Horace—though both excellent—could not be set to music with the same results. Unsurprisingly, it is Petrarch that would clearly best Horace with the aid of musical harmony:

vie più (senz’alcun dubbio) di soave armonia empierà ciascun giudicioso orecchio questa seconda [i.e. del Petrarca], che fatto non avrà la prima. E ciò solamente averrà per la rima, la quale tanto più s’accorderà col suono e più renderà di dolcezza, quanto meno sarà dall’altra sua compagna rima lontana.<sup>35</sup>

This last remark is addressed not only to the previously mentioned *verso sciolto*, but also the use of widely separated rhymes. For Gabriele, proper epic poetry must be built on a kind of meter in which one hears the rhyme, the specific property of vernacular languages. Yet he also seems to share the view that proper epic poetry must also share the two qualities mentioned earlier: the ability to produce a sense of grandeur and *gravitas*, and the openness to narrative length.

Following this excursus on metrical form, Gabriele ends on a point that seems to belie the preceding discussion: ultimately it is not the meter that renders a given topic “sublime o grave,” but rather the appropriate use of diction, rhetorical figures, and characters that properly express the inherent gravity of a theme. Yet, despite his awareness of the various factors contributing to one’s general sense of the “sublime” aesthetic effect of a poem, Gabriele does not elaborate on the use of these figures to produce an “epic” sound. Instead, the potential *gravitas* of *terza rima* occupies much of the discussion, and there are no practical examples for the creation of this specific aesthetic.

<sup>34</sup> *Trattati*, I, pg. 317.

<sup>35</sup> *Trattati*, I, pg. 317. Note as well that, as early as the 1530s, we find the specific phrasing of “filling the ear” that will later appear in both Tasso’s *Discorsi dell’arte poetica* and Pellegrino’s dialogue, seen above.

Ultimately, in his discussion of epic poetry, Daniello does not address questions of plot, verisimilitude, or epistemological concerns vis-a-vis history, all major issues in later sixteenth century debates.<sup>36</sup> Establishing a grandiose subject matter is a sufficient, though not necessary, condition for the production of epic poetry. The remaining element is that of mode of expression, which is reduced to the problem of meter. In terms of producing a vernacular epic, Daniello thus prioritizes manner of expression over issues of narrative.

Central to Daniello's approach is therefore the concept of stylistic decorum, which allows him to both reject metrical alternatives and justify already established (and authorized) vernacular models, allowing him to remain within a loosely Bembian framework. The critical vocabulary employed is rhetorical in character: genres, or perhaps better "literary kinds," are to be distinguished in the first instance according to theme. The translation of these forms into the vernacular then involves deciding which of the available—and authorized—poetic forms best fit a given subject matter. This process seems to rely mainly on an implicit sense of the correspondence between form and content, rather than any rationally determined set of principles.

This exploration of Daniello's approach to problematizing vernacular epic, specifically his rejection of other forms allows for an expansion of our field of inquiry. By rejecting alternative metrical schemes and establishing his own position in the *Poetica*, Daniello offers a preliminary sketch of a field of debate concerning the problem of vernacular epic. Using his work as a starting point, we can reconstruct the oppositions within this debate in order to clarify the intellectual and artistic context that leads not only to the later debate concerning Tasso's epic in the 1580s, but also—and more importantly—to the establishment of specific literary paradigms that will inform Tasso's own epic composition in the 1560s. Understanding such antagonistic positions will also provide insight into practical technical concerns, such as choice of meter, which in turn implicate particular criteria for accepting and rejecting different forms based on rationally determined principles as well as developing literary tastes. Our task consists in accounting for the range of possible forms of epic available to poets in the early sixteenth century, together with the specific theoretical positions staked out by poets and theorists to justify and legitimize each of the poetic possibilities.

For Daniello, working within a specific Venetian intellectual context, *terza rima* becomes the sole possibility for epic poetry for two principal reasons: first, "sanctioned" models have already authorized the meter, specifically Dante and Petrarch; second, the perceived

<sup>36</sup> See especially Weinberg's *History of Literary Criticism*, vol 2.

flexibility of the form allows for a writer to retain the essential feature of vernacular poetry, namely rhyme. Despite his claim to develop newer—though classically inflected—types of poetry that would provide intellectual satisfaction, Daniello prioritizes the *senso dell’udire*, the sensible material qualities of vernacular verse. This emphasis on sound situates Daniello clearly within Bembo’s cultural project, which prefers to refine traditional formal elements—rhyming, the texture of vowels and consonants, aesthetic variety—rather than develop new kinds of poetry.

## 2.2 TRISSINO, ALAMANNI, AND “VERSO SCIOLTO”

Of the two metrical schemes rejected by Daniello, the first is unrhymed hendecasyllable, also known as *verso sciolto*.<sup>37</sup> This meter initially emerged within the theoretical discussions of a group of intellectuals in the Orti Oricellari in Florence in the first two decades of the sixteenth century.<sup>38</sup> Unlike Bembo’s attention to the reproduction of traditional vernacular forms, the members of this circle were primarily interested in the recovery and emulation of classical arts and letters. *Verso sciolto* was first theorized and employed in early attempts to reproduce classical—specifically Greek—tragedy, which was then undergoing a prolific period of translation.<sup>39</sup>

Within these early discussions, two specific figures began to make use of *verso sciolto* for other genres, specifically epic poetry: Gian Giorgio Trissino (1478-1550) and Luigi Alamanni (1495-1556). Both would go on to write epics—printed at roughly the same time in 1547-48—and both would be remembered ultimately for their failures as epic

<sup>37</sup> For an introduction to the use of *verso sciolto*, in particular the early attempts to create an epic verse, see Camillo Guerrieri Crocetti (1932). *G.B. Giralaldi ed il pensiero critico del secolo XVI*. Milan: Soc. ed. Dante Alighieri, pp. 301-333 and Guido Arbizzoni (1978). «Esperimenti di metrica eroica tra Cinque e Seicento.» In: *Il Contesto* 3, pp. 183-207, in particular pp. 190ff.

<sup>38</sup> Apart from their particularly disastrous political ideology, the intellectuals participating in the Orti Oricellari were concerned with the intensive study and emulation of antiquity. Among them were Iacopo Nardi, Giovanni Rucellai, Alessandro de’ Pazzi, and Lodovico Martelli, all innovators of vernacular comedy and tragedy who imitated classical—particularly Greek—models. The gardens provide the background as well for the discussions found in the dialogues *De honesta disciplina* by Pietro Crinito, and Giovanni Rucellai’s *Ragionamento sopra le difficoltà di mettere in regole la nostra lingua*. For an overview, see Rita Comanducci (2014). «Orti Oricellari.» In: *Machiavelli: enciclopedia machiavelliana*. Ed. by Gennaro Sasso. Vol. 2. Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, pp. 261-65.

<sup>39</sup> Trissino is often credited as the inventor of blank verse, although the Florentines later claim the first poets to use it were Alamanni (with his didactic poem *La coltivazione*) and Iacopo Nardi (with the choruses of his two comedies, *Amicizia* and *I due felici rivali*, both performed 1512-13). For a discussion of Alamanni, see Martelli Mario Bausi Francesco. (2004). *La metrica italiana: teoria e storia*. Florence: Casa Editrice Le Lettere, pp. 150-151; for Nardi, see idem, pg. 168. For experimentations in tragic meter, see Paola Cosentino (2003). *Cercando Melpomene : esperimenti tragici nella Firenze del primo Cinquecento*. Rome: Vecchiarelli.

poets.<sup>40</sup> Of the two, Trissino offers the clearest example of a dedicated practitioner of epic *verso sciolto*, since Alamanni would ultimately change the metrical structure of his poem to *ottava rima*—a point we will address in the next chapter. Despite their diverging intellectual and artistic paths, which arise from their specific social situations, both offer important interventions in the theorization of *verso sciolto*, explicitly against other forms such as *terza rima*.

### 2.2.1 *Against Rhyme*

Let us begin with Trissino, who offers the earliest attempt to justify using *verso sciolto*. Born into a wealthy aristocratic family in Vicenza in 1478, Trissino spent his early life in the Veneto region before traveling south to Florence and Rome in the early years of the sixteenth century. He participated in the intellectual life of both cities, such as in the Orti Oricellari and later at the curial court in Rome under Leo X, where he became involved in the *questione della lingua*. While in Rome he also rediscovered Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia*, which would become central to his own perspective on the language question.<sup>41</sup>

In contrast to Bembo's choice of a limited field of forms taken from fourteenth century models, Trissino argues for a literary language built on a kind of erudite pluralism, capable of drawing on linguistic forms from any region and period in Italy. Despite the apparent openness and flexibility of this paradigm, Trissino envisions an elite literary community whose task is to judge the acceptability of new forms for adaptation into a highly cultivated metaregional language. He emphasizes above all the development of an erudite lexicon. The new intellectual elite should strive to adopt recondite and obscure words not only from different regions of Italy, but also from Latin and Greek.<sup>42</sup> Such a linguistic project ultimately rejects Bembo's archaicizing — though homogenous — adoption of strictly fourteenth century Tuscan models, as well as contemporary, regionally specific solutions, such as that of the Florentines.<sup>43</sup> Within this erudite linguistic framework, Trissino develops his particular understanding of poetic forms, derived almost exclusively

<sup>40</sup> We will not consider the failures of these two poets in any sustained manner, although chapters 3-4 will make references to the poor reception of the poems of Trissino and Alamanni in the late 1540s. In reality, a more comprehensive study on "epic failures" needs to be carried out.

<sup>41</sup> For an overview of Trissino's life, see Paolo D'Achille, "Trissino, Gian Giorgio." In: *Enciclopedia dell'Italiano*, 2011. Web. *Treccani*. Accessed April 2017.

<sup>42</sup> For a discussion of Trissino's philo-Hellenism, with an analysis of his actual linguistic practice and borrowing of erudite terms in his own poetry, see Maurizio Vitale (2010). *L'omerida italico: Gian Giorgio Trissino. Appunti sulla lingua dell'"Italia liberata da' Gotthi"*. Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti.

<sup>43</sup> Trissino's indifference to specific aspects of the tradition also led him to attempt to reform vernacular orthography with the introduction of Greek letters.

from classical models. This form of classicism differs radically from the one seen in Daniello, who integrates classical authors such as Horace into a fundamentally vernacular project. Trissino, by contrast, appears indifferent — even hostile — to much of the vernacular tradition, and *verso sciolto* emerges explicitly as means of avoiding the sound of typically Italian forms.

The specific target of his critique of traditional vernacular poetry is rhyme. As early as 1512 Trissino composed a tragedy, the *Sophonisba*, in blank verse, imitating the Greek works of Sophocles and Euripides. The tragedy was first printed in 1524, and in the dedicatory letter to Pope Leo X, Trissino offers a justification for using an unusual metrical scheme. According to Trissino, *verso sciolto* is the best meter for a large range of literary kinds, especially drama:

lo vederà non solamente ne le narrationi et orationi utilissimo, ma nel muovere compassione necessario; perciò che quel sermone, il quale suol muovere questa, nasce dal dolore, et il dolore manda fuori non pensate parole, onde la rima, che pensiero dimostra è veramente a la compassione contraria.<sup>44</sup>

For Trissino, the noticeably artificial sound of rhyme is inappropriate for tragedy, as it distracts the audience from reaching the psychological state required to experience proper tragic compassion.<sup>45</sup>

As an example of Trissino’s usage of *verso sciolto*, let us look at the opening lines of the play, spoken by Sophonisba:

Lassa, dove poss’io voltar la lingua,  
Se non là ’ve la spinge il mio pensiero?  
Che giorno, e notte sempre mi molesta.  
E come posso disfogare alquanto  
Questo grave dolor, che ’l cuor m’ingombra,

<sup>44</sup> See Bernard Weinberg (1970). *Trattati di poetica e retorica del Cinquecento*. Vol. 2. Bari: Laterza, pp. 608-609. Trissino also used the *verso sciolto* to compose a comedy *I Simillimi*, as well as several eclogues which were included in his *Rime* from 1529.

<sup>45</sup> For Trissino, rhymed structures do not contribute to a work’s realism, understood not in the sense of attention to daily lived experience, but rather to the particularities of narrative or drama. Francesco Bausi notes that Trissino substituted “lo sciolto all’ottava per un’esigenza di “realismo” (in senso aristotelico, s’intende): la mimesi, l’imitazione, impongono di liberare la poesia epica — in quanto poesia essenzialmente narrativa — dai vincoli innaturali della rima e dalla frammentazione strofica, [...] per consentirle di seguire da vicino, e nei minimi particolari, lo svolgersi concreto ed effettivo dell’azione.” See Francesco Bausi (1989). ««Imitar col canto chi parla»: Verso sciolto e «recitar cantando» nell’estetica cinquecentesca.» In: *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance* 51, pp. 553-568, in particular pg. 553. One issue with the usual discussion of Trissino’s use of *verso sciolto*, including the one made by Bausi, is that the presence of *ottava rima* throughout all of Trissino’s reflections on meter is taken for granted. Both this chapter and the following will hopefully show that *ottava rima* is absent in discussions of meter until well into the 1540s, despite the ubiquity of the metrical form in more “popular” works. In other words, Trissino’s discussion of blank verse in the early decades of the sixteenth century most likely did not include a refutation of *ottava rima* because the metrical form was not considered an option for an “erudite” form of poetry by most intellectual writers.

Se non manifestando i miei martiri?  
I quali ad un ad un voglio narrarti.<sup>46</sup>

The style of these opening lines is relatively simple and straightforward, without complex syntax or overly figurative language. Although we will not analyze further Trissino's work, it is worth keeping in view his practice as well.

Unlike Daniello two decades later, Trissino finds rhyme to be not only an incidental element of vernacular literature, but even an impediment for certain literary forms.<sup>47</sup> Instead of prioritizing harmonious sound, he focuses on the effects of language, drawing on descriptions of tragic pity found in both Horace and Aristotle. Though he too relies on similar classical sources, his emphasis is inherently different from that of either Bembo or Daniello. In fact, Trissino offers a broad division of poetry into three general types: narration, dialogue, and—implicitly—rhymed lyrical poetry.<sup>48</sup> In other words, rhymed poetry lacks the proper artistic instruments to account for the other two realms of poetic expression.<sup>49</sup>

Trissino also acknowledges that blank verse may not be well received due to its radical departure from vernacular tradition. He feels that it is necessary to assure the Pope that blank verse will eventually provide an artistically viable new metrical form: "io mi persuado, che se a Vostra Beatitudine non spiacerà di volere alquanto le orecchie a tal numero accomodare, che lo troverà e migliore, e più nobile, e forse men facile ad asseguire, di quello che per aventura è reputato." Like Daniello, Trissino thus situates himself within an emerging field of debate against other positions that seek to discredit his particular literary enterprise. Though we will not explore the uncertain beginnings of blank verse, it is important to note that metrical debates have clearly begun as early as the first decade of the sixteenth century. The character of the early debate is, however, easily inferred from Trissino's claim that *verso sciolto* is both noble and difficult to compose.

<sup>46</sup> *La Sophonisba del Trissino*. Venice: Tolomeo Ianiculo, 1529, fo. br. The orthography has been modernized in order to avoid eye strain.

<sup>47</sup> It should also be noted that, as early as the *Sophonisba*, Trissino is already making the claim for avoiding rhyme due to its unnatural structure, yet the justification there has more to do with drama. Trissino's project should be seen in contrast with that of Alessandro Vellutello who, in his preface to Agostino Ricchi's *I tre tiranni* (1534), argues that drama should avoid rhyme, but in order to reproduce daily speech and natural pronunciation. This distinction has yet to receive the full attention that it deserves. Vellutello's preface can be found in Weinberg, *Trattati*, I, pp. 221-26.

<sup>48</sup> This division also seems to follow a classical typology (i.e. narrative, representative, mixed), though it does not focus on specific genres.

<sup>49</sup> This is not to say that the vernacular tradition lacks drama or narrative, but merely that Trissino does not acknowledge older forms, such as *sacre rappresentazioni* or even more well-known works such as Poliziano's *Favola d'Orfeo*.

## 2.2.2 Alamanni's Classicism

Though Trissino offers perhaps the earliest printed defense of *verso sciolto*, a clearer elaboration on using this particular meter for both dramatic dialogue as well as epic narration can be found in the works of Luigi Alamanni (1495-1556). Alamanni was born in Florence, where he participated actively in various intellectual and artistic milieus. As a result of shifting political powers, he fled into exile in France, seeking the patronage of wealthy French patrons, such as Francis I.<sup>50</sup>

Apart from his early interest in tragedy and his vernacular translation of Sophocles' *Antigone* (composed 1520-27), Alamanni is best known for his use of *verso sciolto* in his work *La coltivazione* (printed 1546, planned as early as 1530), in imitation of Virgil's *Georgics*. He also composed two epics, *Girone il cortese* (printed 1548) and the *Avarchide* (composed 1550-54; printed posthumously in 1570). Both of these would also be composed in *ottava rima*, rather than *verso sciolto*. Despite his interest in epic, his views on blank verse appear in his earliest lyrical works, which were dedicated to the stylistic and metrical expansion of vernacular poetry through the imitation of classical forms and meters. The virtuosic range of Alamanni's abilities can be seen in one of his earliest works, the *Opere toscane* (1532). This work is a vast collection of poems in which Alamanni reproduces a large number of classical genres; apart from a few sonnets, there are eclogues, elegies, satires, “fables,” and psalms.<sup>51</sup> Several of these forms, the eclogue in particular, make use of *verso sciolto*. The first eclogue, for example, reads as follows:

TYR. Dolce l'acuto suon da gli alti pini  
 Vien di Zephyro, & d'Euro, & dolce anchora  
 Non men di quel la tua zampognia estimo,  
 Tal che dopo a gli Dei la gloria e 'l pregio  
 Sia del buon Melibeo tra noi pastori.<sup>52</sup>

This poem offers a clear imitation of classical eclogue, from Theocritus to Virgil, through a dialogue between two classical shepherds (Tyrsi and Melibeo) and its use of traditionally pastoral themes and language.

In the preface to this work, dedicated to Francis I, Alamanni outlines his vision of a new elevated vernacular language. As with Daniello and Trissino, Alamanni envisions ennobling the vernacular language to compete with classical literature. The choice of *verso*

<sup>50</sup> For Alamanni's biography, see Roberto Weiss (1960). *Alamanni, Luigi*.

<sup>51</sup> Alamanni recognizes that he has been “più licentioso di quel che furon gli antichi nostri Toscani.” Yet the motive for this potentially inappropriate freedom comes from his choice of literary models, Tibullus and Propertius, rather than any vernacular model.

<sup>52</sup> Luigi Alamanni (1532). *Opere toscane*. Lyon: Sebastianus Gryphius, pg. 108.



*sciolto*, which he himself claims to have invented, functions as a means of opening up vernacular literature to classical forms.<sup>53</sup> His approach is largely consonant with Trissino's. Indeed, according to Alamanni, any poetic tradition which relies entirely on rhyme is unnatural. Rhyming in drama, he claims, forces the interlocutors to make use of the same length of phrasing, and this symmetrical construction not only proves inimical to the necessary variety in length that emerges in real conversation, but it also produces a "certa affettazione non degna d'un buon poeta." In other words, Trissino and Alamanni both target rhymes as merely "parole pensate" and "affettatione."<sup>54</sup>

In order to justify his position, Alamanni analyzes the history of rhyming. He identifies a common misunderstanding regarding the nature of the vernacular, namely the belief that the abundance of word-final vowels naturally led earlier poets to make use of rhymes, whose "vaghezza" would have been unacceptable in a consonant-laden language such as Latin. He argues against those who would claim that the high incidence of vowels forced earlier vernacular poets to turn to rhyming. On the contrary, Alamanni claims, the appearance of this convention appeared less due to any linguistic specificity, and more due to the poor judgment on the part of early poets, who were foolishly captivated by charming sounds.<sup>55</sup> Since rhyme is therefore merely one option out of many, Alamanni's massive collection of poetry is intended as a corrective to this "mal fondata usanza" of rhyming in the vernacular.

Alamanni further emphasizes this "ill-founded custom" as especially problematic for narrative forms of poetry. While Trissino only mentions "narratione" in passing, Alamanni clearly articulates the requirements of narrative, specifically heroic, poetry. He writes that rhyme

nelle materie più alte, & che più son presso all'heroico è tanto men concessa, per ciò che portando in se la rima più del leggiadro & dell'amoroso che del grave, scema in gran parte al poema la dovuta sua maestà, sforza di tanti in tanti versi (secondo che porton le rime) a finir la sentenza, & mena il poeta sempre per una certa uniformità, che al più torna in fastidio, & lo restringe in

<sup>53</sup> For a discussion of the history of *verso sciolto*, see Bausi and Martelli, *La metrica italiana*.

<sup>54</sup> The "naturalness" of this language is not to be understood as identical to spoken language. Both Alamanni and Trissino employ a sophisticated and highly erudite lexicon, a point which seems obvious enough but which requires further elaboration. For now, the "naturalness" referenced by both poets should be understood mainly as the negation of a specific form of lyrical affectation.

<sup>55</sup> "[H]an detto molti che la rima fu come cosa necessaria trovata da i nostri poeti, i quali havendo considerato che tutte le parole Toscane han termine nel fine del verso di vocale, volsero (come cosa povera) che fusse accompagnata dalla vaghezza della rima, ma questi tali mostran di non sapere ch'ella habbia origine havuta davanti che in noi, ne Provenzali, i quali in contrario han quasi tutte le lor dictioni terminanti (come meglio di me & di tutti gli altri sa la Maestà vostra) in consonante, talmente che più presto vulgare & mal fondata usanza da quei primi si può chiamare che ragionevole." *Opere toscane*, fo. \*3r.

certi prescritti termini, ove la varietà, & la gravità (principali parti del tutto) son tolte via.<sup>56</sup>

This passage appears to be the earliest theorization of epic aesthetic expectations in the vernacular, and the language anticipates the description of heroic verse described by Daniello’s dialogue printed five years later. For Alamanni, rhyme is detrimental to epic *gravitas* (“gravità”) and majesty (“maestà”) for two reasons. First, it produces an effect that is noticeably tied to lightness and love poetry. Second, the uniform nature of rhymed metrical structures is anathema to the narrative flexibility required of the epic poet, who is forced to yoke his ideas to the repetition of sound. Though it is difficult to trace the exact development of these ideas, this conception of heroic poetry as predicated on gravity and narrative flexibility will remain a key component, if not the fundamental principle, for all later arguments about epic meter.

Alamanni outlines two competing conceptions of literary and aesthetic value, articulated within a rather consistent set of critical terms: first, the popular vernacular literary tradition in the early decades of the Cinquecento, which emphasizes rhyme, “vaghezza,” and rigid formal structures; second, a classicizing, though newer, set of forms which aim to produce not only a realistic form of dialogue, but also the “altezza,” “nobiltà,” and “gravità” of narrative heroic poetry. Although Alamanni does not provide any practical advice for the production of heroic verse, and his anthology contains no narrative works, he does offer a working theoretical paradigm for the use of *verso sciolto*. When Daniello argues several years later that *terza rima* is capable of producing *gravitas* and narrative movement, it is likely that he is responding to this specific framework.

### 2.2.3 Trissino’s Epic Ambitions

Though Alamanni will eventually turn away from *verso sciolto* for his own epic poems, Trissino continued not only to theorize but also use *verso sciolto* in his epic, *L’Italia liberata da’ Gotthi*. He began working on this poem sometime in the 1520s, in the midst of the debates about the *questione della lingua* and *verso sciolto*, but it would not be published until 1547–48. Despite being printed so late, this text—in particular the paratextual material—offers further insight into Trissino’s conception of *verso sciolto* in the same years as the *Sofonisba*. While Alamanni would not provide specific methods for elevating *verso sciolto* in epic poetry, Trissino goes into greater detail about the ways in which unrhymed verse

<sup>56</sup> *Opere toscane*, c. \*3r.

allows for a greater mimetic potential by detaching itself completely from the phonic niceties of traditional vernacular poetry.

As we saw, Trissino claims in his preface to *Leo X* that free verse is appropriate “ne le narrationi et orationi.” While he justifies his tragedy as a work comprised of dialogue, his epic poem focuses on the problem of narration and the depiction of action.<sup>57</sup> In the dedicatory letter of the *Italia*, addressed not to the pope, but to the emperor Charles V himself, Trissino explains the theoretical framework for understanding the composition of his poem. He claims, first, that he has followed the rules of Aristotle, which appears to mean the construction of a unified plot (“di una sola azione”). Second, he identifies Homer as his supreme model and “Idea.”<sup>58</sup> The principal element of Homer’s poetry that Trissino seeks to imitate is the abundance of detail.<sup>59</sup> In fact, since his goal is to provide a more accurate and “realistic” representation of human actions, Trissino sets himself against the prevailing tastes of his contemporaries, who prefer to imitate Latin poetry by emphasizing “la sonorità et alteza dei versi.”<sup>60</sup>

Although he does not explicitly mention *verso sciolto*, Trissino offers a description of his poetic project that allows more insight into both his use of that metrical form, as well as his overall aesthetic preferences. He contrasts the erudite and wondrous “larghezza” of Homer’s works, which has been scorned by his contemporaries, with the vacuous formal and acoustic emphasis of vernacular poetry. As with Alamanni, Trissino develops a division between a learned, particularly Greek, version of vernacular classicism and the predominant tradition which is based primarily on the sounds of lyric. Indeed, according to Trissino, it is due to the unfortunate emphasis on sound that a true epic poem “non si è fatta più ne la nostra lingua Italiana.”<sup>61</sup>

Trissino then elaborates on the necessary elements of heroic poetic language that will elevate *verso sciolto* without overly relying on the phonic character. His central concern is the production of a vivid image in the mind of the reader, a goal which can only be

57 Manuscript evidence supports this long period of gestation, see Paola Pecci (2015b). *Riscrittura e imitazione omerica ne L'Italia liberata dai Goti di Gian Giorgio Trissino*.

58 “Ne solamente nel costituire la favola di una azione sola, e grande, e che habbia principio, meco, e fine, mi sono sforzato servare le regole d’Aristotele, il quale elessi per maestro, si come tolsi Homero per Duce, e per Idea.” See Gian Giorgio Trissino (1547). *La Italia liberata da Gotthi del Trissino*. Rome: Valerio e Luigi Dorici, c. \*iijv.

59 “[H]o tentato di seguirlo da la lunga, imitando, et adorando le sue pedate; e cercando, a mio potere, esser come lui coppioso, e largo.” See *La Italia liberata*, c. \*iijv.

60 “Et però sapendo io, che la poesia è imitatione de le azioni humane, e che quanto ella più efficacemente le rappresenta al nostro intelletto, tanto meglio eseguisce il suo fine; per questo ho voluto abbracciare la dotta, e meravigliosa larghezza di Homero, da alcuni de la nostra età schiffata, e biasmata, più tosto, che la sonorità, et alteza dei versi, da molti, non molto eruditi, sopra modo amata, disiata, e laudata.” See *La Italia liberata*, cc. \*iijv - \*iiijr.

61 *La Italia liberata*, c. \*iiijr.

reached through imitation of the previously mentioned abundance of detail exemplified by Homer. The chief rhetorical figures for the creation of such imagery are analogies, metaphors, and images, which Homer used to great effect:

ad ogniuno, che lo legge par essere quasi presente a quelle azioni, ch'egli describe, cosa, che leggendo la maggior parte de i poeti latini, non avviene; perciò, che alcuni di essi per voler fare altezza ne i versi loro, hanno schifato il dire diligentemente tutte le circostanze, e le particolarità de le azioni, come cose, che nel vero fanno bassezza; la onde esse azioni poi manco vive, e manco efficaci si rappresentano a i lettori.<sup>62</sup>

Trissino not only continues to criticize vernacular poetry and its emphasis on sound, but he also targets Latin verse, which has produced a certain tendency and preference for “altezza” over content. In practice, he will also focus on the use of an erudite diction in his poetry, rather than any interest in syntactical or rhetorical complexity. In fact, the style itself is rather simple in terms of composition, while the lexicon is full of Greek neologisms and peculiar spelling.<sup>63</sup>

Similar theoretical positions against the phonetic character of the vernacular are also repeated in a later edition of Trissino's *Poetica*, composed around the same time as the publication of his epic in 1547-48.<sup>64</sup> In that text, we find an explicit distinction between two general realms of poetry: on the one hand, a kind of verse that prioritizes aesthetic pleasure, sweetness, and beauty, and, on the other hand, the vast variety of genres that are better expressed through *verso sciolto*:

I versi senza rime, cioè senza accordare le ultime desinenze, sono più atti a servire a quasi tutte le parti della poesia che con le rime. [...] Ben è vero che nei cori delle tragedie e delle comedie e nelle materie che trattano di amore e di laudi, ove la dolcezza e la vaghezza specialmente vi si richiede, esse rime con le sue regole non sono da schivare; ma vi si denno ricevere et abbracciare per esser membra principali di essa vaghezza e dolcezza.<sup>65</sup>

Such a division echoes his earlier statement in the preface to the *Sofonisba*, which distinguishes “orationi e narrationi” from rhymed poetry. Indeed, “materie che trattano di amore e di laudi” is doubtless an indication of the lyric poetry of vernacular tradition.

<sup>62</sup> *La Italia liberata*, c. \*iiijr.

<sup>63</sup> For an extended discussion of the erudite style, particularly the lexicon, see Maurizio Vitale (2010). *L'omerida italico: Gian Giorgio Trissino. Appunti sulla lingua dell'“Italia liberata da' Gotthi”*. Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti.

<sup>64</sup> These books of Trissino's poetics were first printed posthumously in 1562. Weinberg dates the composition to the years 1547-48, when the first commentary on the Poetics emerged, Francesco Robortello's *In Librum Aristotelis de Arte Poetica Explicationes* in 1548, together with the first vernacular translation in 1549 by Bernardo Segni. See Weinberg, *Trattati*, II, pp. 653-54.

<sup>65</sup> *Trattati*, II, pg. 7.

For Trissino, such poetry, together with tragic and comic choruses, can and should use rhyme since its primary function is beauty and sweetness.

Unlike in his earlier statements, Trissino also offers a brief history of the development of narrative forms of rhymed meter. In his view, historically there have been two options for vernacular poets: *terza rima*, invented by Dante for his *Commedia*, and *ottava rima*, invented by Boccaccio in order to treat martial subject matter.<sup>66</sup> However, neither of these verse forms allows for the degree of narrative flexibility required of the epic, since they remain fixed within structures designed to promote the “vaghezza e dolcezza” mentioned above. In his own poem, which is “materia d’arme” (that is, not “materia d’amore”), he refused both forms for specific reasons:

[le rime] non mi pareno atte a materia continuata, sì per lo accordare spesso le desinenzie dalle quali nasce una certa uniformità di figure, sì eziandio perché in esse si convien sempre avere relazione da dui versi a dui versi, o ver da tre a tre, o da quattro a quattro, o da otto a otto, e simili; la qual cosa è totalmente contraria alla continuazione della materia e concatenazione dei sensi e delle costruzioni.

The reasons for this new meter continue to follow the same logic seen earlier, including the justification offered by Alamanni: in contrast to fixed and uniform metrical structures, *verso sciolto* allows for the free movement of a “materia continuata,” the “continuazione della materia,” and the “concatenazione dei sensi e delle costruzioni.”<sup>67</sup> For Trissino, the overwhelming pressure to rhyme in the vernacular prevents poets from producing truly classical epic, which must be conceptualized in terms of the effective narration of action, rather than the pleasantness of sound.

Regarding such narrative efficacy, Trissino further focuses on the superabundance of detail in describing actions. Such details will produce a more vivid image in the reader’s mind, further satisfying the criteria of *enargeia* that seem so crucial to Trissino’s epic aes-

<sup>66</sup> “Ma perché fino alla età sua [di Dante] non furon scritte in questa lingua cose d’arme, come egli dice nel suo libro Della volgare eloquenzia, parve a Giovanni Boccaccio trattare ancora questa parte, e trovò l’ottava rima nella quale scrisse il suo Arcita e Palemone et altre cose. Le quali ottave rime senz’alcun dubio sono ancor esse serventesi e canzoni, e queste tali sono state poi usate da quasi tutti coloro che hanno scritto in materia d’arme, cioè dal Pulci, dal Boiardo, dall’Ariosto, e simili.” See *Trattati*, II, pg. 47.

<sup>67</sup> He does, however, believe that the hendecasyllable is the appropriate sort of line to use: “E però levai lo accordare le desinenzie e ritenni il verso, cioè lo endecasillabo, per non essere in questa lingua altra sorte di versi che siano più atti a materia continuata né migliori di quelli, essendo lo endecasillabo (come dice Dante) superiore a tutti gli altri versi di questa lingua, sì di occupazione di tempo come di capacità di sentenzie, di vocaboli, e di costruzioni.” He also makes a point about his imitators, specifically in drama (perhaps thinking about writers such as Agostoni Ricchi): “Et in questa tale qualità di versi siamo stati imitati da molti, e diconli versi sciolti per essere liberi dal convenire accordare le ultime desinenzie, laonde sono attissimi a tutti i poemi dragmatici. Questo adunque sarà il verso che secondo il parer mio allo eroico si conviene.” see *Trattati*, II, pp. 47-48.

thetic.<sup>68</sup> The movement of such detailed, itemized narration is impeded by the rhythmic and sonic conventions emphasized by Trissino's contemporaries, Bembo first of all, and Daniello later. For Daniello, the free conceptual and narrative movement necessary for epic should not be given priority over the specific qualities of the Italian language(s). Trissino's sensibility, however, is directed entirely to an erudite copia that also lends itself to the expansion of knowledge in his readers.<sup>69</sup> Yet, despite the vast unpopularity of Trissino's radical views, and the universal lack of success of his own works, his contributions to the debate concerning the proper form of epic would force subsequent authors to come to terms with the aesthetic and formal conditions of their own poetry.

To recapitulate, Daniello's *Della poetica* in 1536 is the first text to address the possibility of vernacular epic specifically as an unresolved question that has already elicited multiple answers. The manner of framing the solutions to this problem suggests that a debate has already emerged in the previous decades about methods for translating literary forms from classical languages, a point further confirmed by Trissino's attempts to defend *verso sciolto* as early as 1512. Daniello's choice of *terza rima* therefore constitutes the taking of a position against other possibilities, which he also lists and rejects due to their insufficient conditions for "true" vernacular poetry. The complexity of this earlier conversation can also be seen in Daniello's synthesis of Bembo's vernacular literary program (which openly avoids the direct imitation of classical Greco-Roman authors) with a Horatian conception of literary form (which distinguishes poetic forms according to subject matter and meter). Such a combination of approaches reveals the tension between those poets who follow Bembo, writing only sonnets and novellas, and others who seek to translate classical forms.

With Alamanni and Trissino, a similar opposition emerges between traditional vernacular forms, which are characterized as entirely lyrical, and new forms based on classical models which have yet to find realization. They reject the aesthetic criteria of their contemporaries, who require the use of rhyme, which produces an "affected" or "artificial"

68 *Enargeia*, or vividness, will become an important component of later poetics, such as Pigna in the early 1550s, and more importantly Tasso. Writers in the 1530s and 1540s do not seem to mention this particular rhetorical figure. See Luciana Borsetto (1982). «Tra normalizzazione e sperimentazione: appunti sulla questione del verso.» In: *Quasi un piccolo mondo. Tentativi di codificazione del genere epico nel Cinquecento*. Ed. by Guido Baldassarri. Milan: Edizioni Unicopli Milano, pp. 91–127.

69 In his preface to Charles V, he mentions that his poem will provide a trove of examples of military formations, counsels, and so forth. Indeed, the first editions also included several images of military encampments in order to help visualize the structure of the various armies. All of which is to say that Trissino is never particularly interested in the aesthetic experience of his poem.

emphasis on sound. Instead, modern poets should recover classical forms in the vernacular through the recovery of more serious genres and forms found in antiquity.

Despite their differences, Alamanni, Trissino, and Daniello all agree on one point that bears emphasizing, namely that the vernacular tradition is only at an early stage of its development. This position contrasts with Bembo's cultural project, which views the Trecento as a golden age of literature, where the vernacular had already reached the summit of linguistic expression. Subsequent authors merely signal a progressive decline in quality, much like the history of Latin following the fall of the Roman empire. As a result, Daniello, Trissino, and Alamanni offer a description of the vernacular as a language in need of further refinement by looking to classical literature, either through a consolidation of traditional forms or through experimentation. The means of achieving such development differ for each writer, yet it is clear that they also share a sense of classical forms that orients their vision to future possibilities. Such possibilities are set in contrast with traditional Italian forms such as sonnets and *canzoni*—i.e. those promoted as the sole guarantors of literary value by Bembo. For all three writers, at stake is the production of intellectually justifiable non-lyrical poetry, such as drama, and especially narrative.

Given their desire for narrative poetry, all three writers focus on the issue of meter, which allows for a broader discussion on aesthetic criteria and means of evaluating a properly sounding epic form. Within this discussion there are two main requirements for epic: first, the vague—though omnipresent—aesthetic category of *gravitas*, which is defined primarily over and against lyrical sweetness and charm; second, narrativity, which must be understood in terms of compositional freedom to expand or contract syntactical structures according to narrative movement.<sup>70</sup> Lyrical forms, due to a regulated metrical scheme, force the poet to constrain his syntax—and therefore his thought—to the requirements of a rigid structure. Ultimately, for all three writers, epic becomes intelligible only as a measure of difference from traditional vernacular lyric poetry. With the next authors, namely Claudio Tolomei and Bernardo Tasso, a similar disposition will become apparent, although their solutions to the problem of developing a vernacular language capable of sustaining epic gravity will differ considerably.

<sup>70</sup> Andrea Acribo, in an important study, sets out to look at sixteenth century discussions of *gravitas*; however, he does not attempt to offer any sort of historical development of this category. In fact, he largely treats *gravitas* as some sort of concept that appears spontaneously with Bembo that then re-emerges in the 1550s and 1560s with Della Casa and Tasso. See Andrea Acribo (2001). *Teoria e prassi della gravitas nel Cinquecento*. Florence: F. Cesati.

## 2.3 CLAUDIO TOLOMEI AND “METRICA BARBARA”

In his rejection of those poets who would confuse the “sense of hearing,” Daniello does not mention any specific poets; however, two figures fit well within this description and shall serve as our examples.<sup>71</sup> First, there is Claudio Tolomei (1492-1556), whose metrical experimentation in the 1530s lay at the center of a larger interest in developing new methods for creating a more classically structured vernacular poetry. Second, there is Bernardo Tasso (1493-1569), not only connected to Tolomei’s project, but also known by contemporaries for his unique lyrical inventions.<sup>72</sup> Tolomei himself will also later claim to be the inspiration for Bernardo’s own innovations, and whether or not this claim is true, it is doubtless that he is the first figure to theorize, and experiment, with meter based on the quantitative models of Antiquity.<sup>73</sup> As such, Tolomei offers an alternative to the blank verse of Trissino, one which purports to provide an even stronger link with the vernacular’s Latin roots. An analysis of Tolomei’s contributions to metrical experimentation will prove essential not only for understanding Daniello’s position as defender of a strictly vernacular canon, but also, more generally, for understanding more clearly the developments in the discussion of epic verse in the sixteenth century.

But why would these two authors produce a method of repositioning rhymes, rather than choosing traditional forms or employing blank verse, which was in much wider circulation? The answer comes from their particular conception of the vernacular language in relation to Latin. More specifically, both authors see the imitation and emulation of classical forms as necessarily requiring a reassessment of the acoustic properties of the vernacular. In order to understand the very possibility of developing new metrical schemes (in Tolomei) or creating “distance rhymes” (in Bernardo), it will be necessary to analyze the intellectual backgrounds of these authors and their theoretical discussions of emulating classical meter, specifically classical hexameter.

<sup>71</sup> I am using the term “metrica barbara” to define Claudio Tolomei’s metrical experimentation, following the phrase coined by Giosuè Carducci. Obviously Tolomei himself would never have considered his own work in this manner. See Giosuè Carducci (1881). *Poesia barbara nei secoli XVe XVI a cura di Giosue Carducci*. Bologna: Zanichelli.

<sup>72</sup> Modern scholarship does not associate Bernardo with discussions of *metrica barbara*. Carducci, for instance, does not consider him at all perhaps because Bernardo does not discuss quantitative meter explicitly, despite the clear overlap between his experimentation and that of Tolomei. Their relationship has not, I think, been fully explored.

<sup>73</sup> For a history of attempts to incorporate classical quantitative meter into Italian, see Carducci, *Poesia barbara*.



2.3.1 *The Language Question*

Let us begin with Tolomei, who participated actively in the debates of the *questione della lingua*. Sienese by birth, Tolomei studied law in Bologna before joining the pontifical court in Rome in the late 1510s. Together with Trissino, Bembo, and others, Tolomei participated in the important debates in Rome in the 1520s on the establishment of a cultivated vernacular literary language.<sup>74</sup> He is traditionally seen as a proponent of Tuscanism, against Trissino's national erudite language and Bembo's narrowly conceived archaic language. While in Rome, he also founded and joined several important academies, where he theorized and practiced metrical experimentation. These theories would ultimately culminate in an anthology of "nuova poesia" in 1539, which included not only his works, but also a large number of other participants of the Accademia della Poesia Nuova in Rome.<sup>75</sup> The motivation for producing this new poetry appears in Tolomei's early dialogue on the language question, *Il Cesano*, written around 1524-25, though not published until 1555.

The topic of this dialogue is the proper name to assign to the vernacular, and the fictional conversation consists of several of the primary figures in the language debate, Bembo, Trissino, Baldassare Castiglione, Alessandro de' Pazzi, and Tolomei's *portavoce* Gabriele Cesano.<sup>76</sup> Each character argues for the proper name to assign to the vernacular: *volgare*, Italian, *cortigiano*, Florentine, and lastly, Tuscan. Ultimately, the position that appears to win is that of Cesano, whose argument for "Tuscan" occupies the majority of the work.

Given the linguistic nature of this dialogue, we might expect a discussion of vernacular literary history. Although occasionally poets and writers are identified, there is little in the way of general description of poetic forms, let alone a more sophisticated form such as epic.<sup>77</sup> However, the character Cesano, in his argument for *toscano*, does offer

<sup>74</sup> Apart from his participation in the more theoretical debates, Tolomei also delivered an oration in 1529 to pope Clement VII in the vernacular which was printed in 1533. The dedicatory letter there discusses the polemical nature of Tolomei's choice of vernacular rather than Latin. See Mazzacurati, *La questione della lingua* (1965), in particular pp. 7-11.

<sup>75</sup> For a general description, bibliography, and analysis of the academy's rather heterodox activities, see Ambra Moroncini, "The Accademia della Virtù and Religious Dissent," in Everson J. E., Denis V Reidy, and Lisa Sampson, eds. (2016). *The Italian academies 1524-1700: networks, of culture, innovation and dissent*. London; New York: Routledge, pp. 88-101.

<sup>76</sup> For a discussion of the early metrical experimentations within the realm of tragedy, see Paola Farena (2008). *L'Accademia romana nel primo Cinquecento*. Ed. by Marc Deramaix. Geneva: Droz librairie, pp. 55-74.

<sup>77</sup> At one point, Tolomei does make a distinction of literary forms based on the three classical rhetorical styles (high, middle, low), but he does not elaborate. The examples given are all contemporary, and perhaps interesting for this very reason. Of the "stile alto" he lists Giovanni Rucellai's tragedy *Rosmonda*, and Luigi Alamanni's translation of *Antigone*; for the "stile mezzano e facile," he lists Ariosto's *Satire* and Francesco Berni's *Capitoli*. Lastly, for the "stile basso e umile," he lists the "Commedie (commediucce a la villana) di

a lengthy analysis on the nature of language—specifically the differences between Tuscan and Latin—which relates to Tolomei's later poetic project. In fact, he presents a programmatic approach to distinguishing between vernacular and classical languages, specifically in terms of sound. This coherent conception of the differences between different languages will later form the basis for translating those classical forms into the vernacular.

Cesano follows a largely Bembian conception of the vernacular as distinct from Latin with respect to unique aesthetic properties, namely harmony and rhythm.<sup>78</sup> Though the vernacular is a house "whose foundations were built on Latin," it remains unique in its grammar, syntax, and sound. This last aspect returns frequently in the dialogue, and emphasis falls nearly always on the vernacular's "dolcezza," "soave musica," and "concento." For Tolomei, the existence of these qualities developed naturally over time and they serve to distinguish vernacular languages from classical ones. The harmony of rhyme, in particular, provides a "dolcezza" which "nè la Greca nè la Latina ancora la conobbero o la gustarono mai; anzi viziosi e sozzi si stimavan que' versi ne' quali cotali simili risonanze s'udivano."<sup>79</sup>

At a certain point in the dialogue, Cesano — clearly standing in for Tolomei himself — claims that he intends to experiment with these harmonies by reinforcing them with the quantitative feet present in classical verse. In his view, given the long history of various vernacular languages—ultimately all bastardized forms of Latin—, these quantitative measures have remained hidden in the language. In order to make manifest these traces, he intends to take vernacular verse and temper it with "musiche regole." Such a process "via più dolce renderebbe il parlare e 'l compor de' Toscani."<sup>80</sup> As a result, fundamental to Cesano's—which is to say, Tolomei's—conception of an expanded vernacular poetry is the absolute emphasis on harmony, which seems not to arise necessarily from rhyme but from the texture and rhythm of the language itself. In a sense, Tolomei aligns with Daniello's emphasis on the specificity of the vernacular as founded in a certain sweetness; however, Tolomei's understanding of "sweetness" is fundamentally different, as it is based in a different set of linguistic qualities. He also wishes to imitate classical forms by

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Mescolino e de lo Stricca da Siena." See Claudio Tolomei (1997). *Il Cesano de la lingua toscana*. Ed. by Ornella Castellani Pollidori. Florence: Accademia della Crusca, pg. 58.

<sup>78</sup> Bembo, in the second book of the *Prose*, for instance, writes categorically: "due parti sono quelle che fanno bella ogni scrittura, la gravità e la piacevolezza; e le cose poi, che empiono e compiono queste due parti, son tre, il suono, il numero, la variazione." Bembo, *Prose*, II.14.

<sup>79</sup> *Il Cesano*, pg. 57.

<sup>80</sup> *Il Cesano*, pg. 49.

implementing newer metrical structures, a choice entirely outside the realm of possibility for anyone in Bembo's circle, who were limited by their imitation of Petrarchan forms.

### 2.3.2 *The Search for Classical Sound*

As early as the mid 1520s, Tolomei was already planning to experiment with vernacular metrical structures by adopting a system of quantitative meter based on Latin and Greek. He continued to work on these new forms throughout the 1530s in the various academies that would ultimately become the Accademia della Poesia Nuova. By the late 1530s, he was sending out his verses and publicly presenting his new manner of writing.<sup>81</sup> If we turn to the anthology *Versi et regole della nuova poesia toscana*, we find various poems referring to the essential "harmony" of this new poetry. In Tolomei's first poem in the collection, he writes to another poet Alessandro Marzi:

Questa novella via, che fuor de l'altro camino  
per sì dritta riga girsene, Alesso, vedi:  
ella per antiquo sentier, per ruvido calle  
al puro fonte sacro, al sacro monte mena;  
prima aspra, ma dolce poi, dolcissima quando  
in cima del colle sì duro giunto sei.<sup>82</sup>

Tolomei's project is therefore a movement through the "ruvido calle" of the vernacular to the purity of a classical structure, a journey which will necessarily sound harsh initially before becoming "most sweet." He claims to follow specific classical poets, not only Virgil and Homer, but also Tibullus and Callimachus:

Andianne al monte, voltianci al dritto camino:  
questo per antique forme i poeti mena  
là dove Vergilio vederem varcato et Omero,  
là 've Tibullo già, là 've già Callimaco  
e mille altri poi pien d'alto ingegno et onore.<sup>83</sup>

In Tolomei's view, only by following the "ancient forms" will vernacular poets find honor, despite the immediate unpleasantness of such imitation in the vernacular.<sup>84</sup> Several other

<sup>81</sup> In the preface to the anthology, signed October 18, 1539, Cosimo Pallavicino writes "[i]l felice e divino ingegno del nostro monsignor Claudio Tolomei quest'anno a molti suoi amici ha qui mostrato [questa nuova poesia] in Roma." Pettinari, pg. 223. Later he will defend the potential mediocrity of the lines by saying, "E non è poca meraviglia, che in così corto spazio di tempo che questa cosa è venuta in luce (che possono essere otto o dieci mesi), si siano cotanti e sì nobili versi già composti, de i quali la minor poarte è questa che io vi mando." Pettinari, pg. 226.

<sup>82</sup> Pettinari, pg. 445.

<sup>83</sup> Pettinari, pg. 446.

<sup>84</sup> It is clear from these statements that the notion of "honor" suggests that something is more at stake beyond simply producing nice poems. These poets are clearly searching for methods to legitimize vernacular litera-

poems written by Tolomei make this same point: first, there will seem to be something "harsh" in the radical formal imitation of classical models, but there will be a subsequent realization of the true beauty in such poetry based on classical forms.<sup>85</sup>

Despite the extensive amount of time spent on these experiments, Tolomei nevertheless had reservations about the reception of his new poetry. Notwithstanding his frequent emphasis on his goal of producing a "sweeter" form of poetry, he seems to recognize that this new sound might not be so pleasing as it is fundamentally different from traditional forms. In May 1538, he wrote to Benedetto Accolti, then cardinal of Ravenna, apologizing for the odd sound of his verses:

Non so s'io vi darò trattenimento, o fastidio, mandandovi (come con questa fo) certi saggi d'una nuova poesia, la qual mi sono sforzato in lingua Toscana rinovare ad imitazion de' poeti Grechi, e de' Latini. [...] Solo vi ricorderò che se forse nel principio vi parrano i versi duri, o senza suono, non però vi maravigliate, né ve ne schifate; perche così avviene in tutte quelle cose, ove l'orecchio per innanzi non è avvezzo.<sup>86</sup>

As in Trissino's own statement in the preface to the *Sofonisba* that the pope would have to "accommodate" his ears, Tolomei's letter betrays his own awareness of the distance between traditional vernacular sounds and his new poetry. In fact, by this time, Tolomei had largely removed typical rhyme schemes, thereby giving the impression that his poetry is "without sound" ("senza suono"). Yet, according to Tolomei, with enough time and attention, his interlocutor will begin to hear not Dante or Petrarch, but classical authors such as Tibullus and Propertius. With those Roman writers in mind, perhaps the reader of Tolomei's verses will soften his ears and begin to enjoy this new form of poetry, founded on the recovered beauty and harmony of the ancients.<sup>87</sup>

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ture, and Tolomei appears to have offered one avenue. Although we will not analyze in depth such processes of legitimization, it is worth keeping them in mind. Further study is required to trace these various strands of "legitimization."

<sup>85</sup> In his poem to Pier Pavolo Gualterio, Tolomei writes: "Sforzomi quindi solo svegliar col ruvido canto | del vago tósco lido l'alte onorate voci | [...] | Alti li giorni dica, quando il seme mandasi a' solchi, | quando si purghi poi, quando si coglia poi; | altri più alto salì mostrando le belle ragioni, | perché l'arco giri pien di color vario." See Pettinari, pg. 455. Shortly thereafter, in another poem clearly referring allegorically to his project, he writes: "Mentre sovra un pruno selvaggio, domestico pruno | Alcone innesta, queste parole dice: | - Deh, come s'appiglia dentro a sì fatta durezza | d'un ramo salvatico questo novello ramo, | onde e vaghi fiori con fronde vaghissime poscia | sorgere et indi cari frutti venir si vede, | che ciascun li mira, ognun con dolcezza li coglie, | e gustati poi più saporiti sono..." (458). Lastly, in his poem dedicated to the cardinal de Ridolfi: "Lieto or apri le divine case, e nel tempio devoti | entrino i pastori del vago tósco nido. | Eccoli con nuove sampogne, con ordini nuovi, | inghirlandati d'ellera i rozi capi. | S'odono da lungi cantar dolcissimi versi, | odesi col chiaro suon la soave voce. | [...] | Tu, come far suoli, raccoglili et ornali sempre: | odi le nuove rime, loda la bella via." (462-63).

<sup>86</sup> Pettinari, pp. 100-101.

<sup>87</sup> "Ma degnatevi più volte, pensando di leggere non Dante, o 'l Petrarca, ma Tibullo, Propertio, ad imitazion de li quali son fatti questi, e spero che vi s'addolciranno all'orecchie, e ogni giorno vi piaceranno maggiormente:

A similar pattern of emphasizing the classical—and not vernacular—harmony of the new poetry, together with a defense of its alienating sound, appears again in the prefatory letter to the anthology of new poetry, written by the volume's editor Cosimo Pallavicino, in 1539. He writes that the anthology will serve as a “modello e quasi un primo ritratto de la nuova poesia toscana,” a poetry which, when presented in Rome, charmed its listeners with its “nuova soavità del canto.”<sup>88</sup> This attention to the sound of the verses repeats many times throughout the preface, and Pallavicino is keen to emphasize that these new poets are dedicated to imitating the “soavi concenti” and “dolcezza” of classical poetry.<sup>89</sup>

Yet Pallavicino also recognizes that there may be detractors to this new form, whose first concern is that these new verses are simply “non buoni.” He urges that these new techniques require time to develop, and with “l'orecchio avezzando,” even greater poetry will emerge. Not only that, but Pallavicino argues that these detractors will become so impressed that they will ultimately become “difenditori” of the new poetry.<sup>90</sup> Pallavicino writes that he saw such a conversion take place already with some of the contributors of the anthology who, though they have spent their lives studying theology and philosophy, were enthralled by the “lodevol diletto di questo suono.”<sup>91</sup>

For both Tolomei and Pallavicino, these new forms of poetry are simply the beginning of a larger cultural process of adapting the sound of vernacular to more classical forms. The new rules are the means by which the vernacular will achieve greatness and rival classical literatures. Pallavicino provides an analogy to the *rota Virgilii*, an idea popularized in the middle ages by which a poet would begin with the simplest of Virgil's three forms, the pastoral *Eclogues*, before moving on to more difficult matters, such as the *Georgics*, and the *Aeneid*. For Pallavicino, it is thus necessary to establish a firm foundation before attempting more difficult forms. It is likely for this reason there is an overwhelming emphasis on pastoral themes in the anthology itself.<sup>92</sup> Indeed, Pallavicino mentions that the

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si come in Roma è avvenuta a molti; tal che già si sono svegliati varii spiriti a seguir, e imitar questa nuova poesia, addolciti dalla vaghezza, e harmonia di cotal forma; o ch'ella nuova sia, o che pur sia da gli antichi ritrovata.” Dated Rome, 2 May, 1538.

88 Letter to Giovanfrancesco Valerio, dated 18 October 1539. Cited in Pettinari, pg. 223.

89 Pettinari, pp. 223-24.

90 Pettinari, pg. 228.

91 “Un numero sì grande e di sì grandi uomini esser talmente preso da l'onesto e lodevol diletto di questo suono, che ancor quelli, che tutta la lor vita solamente intorno a le sacre carte consumano e sempre stanno col pensier congiunto a la prima cagione, sono stati da queste nuove Muse sforzati a por la bocca a la nuova sampogna e a mostrarci che ancor essi sanno cantare.” Pettinari, pg 228.

92 Pettinari's analysis of the collection confirms the claim, as he finds that the metrical form of the elegiac distich makes up 87% of the 177 poems in the anthology, with other un-vernacular forms making up 6.2%, free verse 4.5%, and imitations of hexameter 2.2%. See Pettinari pg. 202. Perhaps surprisingly, *verso sciolto* is present in the volume, although only as a means of translating Latin, usually epigrams, written by both classical authors, such as Catullus, or contemporary ones, such as Marcantonio Flaminio. Beyond these metrical

odes, eclogues, and epigrams in the collection should all grouped beneath the traditional pastoral symbol of the "la nuova sampogna."<sup>93</sup> The overwhelming pastoral character of the volume apparently led some to criticize it, a point which Pallavicino himself brings up.<sup>94</sup> Nevertheless, it is clear that Tolomei's project is to set the groundwork for elevating Italian vernacular literature by establishing the lowest genres first.

Even in 1540 there was a general sense that Tolomei was on the correct path to elevating vernacular literature. Paolo Giovio, in a letter to Dionigi Atanagi dated January 24, 1540, offers some praise for the "erudita bottega di M. Claudio," though he also clarifies that "le tradottioni sono bellissime." Regarding the "nuova poesia" as such, he is somewhat sceptical, expressing some concern with the sound of the poetry: "queste longole di versi paiono alquanto strane alle orecchie use." Despite all the erudition and intelligence in constructing new rules for the improvement of vernacular letters, there remains the simple fact that the poetry sounds strange to ears accustomed to more traditional forms. It seems that one of the most difficult obstacles to overcome for poetic experimentation, regardless of erudite content, is the simple fact of the sound of the poetry in relation to more conventional forms.

Yet Giovio, like Pallavicino in his prefatory letter, also recognizes that the true elevation of the vernacular must start somewhere: "Si può dir, ch'ogni cosa ha principio, & il grave fondamento tratto da gli antichi gli potrà dar riputatione, & col tempo non mancarono de gli imitatori, i quali daranno fama, & dolcezza alla nuova rima."<sup>95</sup> By now the term "dolcezza" should not seem casual; indeed, it is the feature which almost every writer uses to describes the sound of specifically vernacular poetry. In other words, for Giovio, Tolomei's poetry seems problematic due to its distance from "dolcezza," the proper realm of vernacular verse.

Despite this initial enthusiasm for the "poesia nuova," Tolomei's project ultimately failed.<sup>96</sup> Later writers would find his rules too abstract and the sound too foreign to

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forms, the majority of the poems are lyrical or pastoral in nature, with many of the contributors adopting the conventional names of shepherds found in Virgil and Theocritus. Tolomei himself became Damoetas, with many other poets addressing him as such. For the identities of the contributors, including their alter egos, see Pettinari, pp. 146-197.

<sup>93</sup> Pallavicino quite explicitly references the classical genres imitated: "chi con epigrammi, chi con elegie, altri con ode, altri con egloghe, questi con epitalami, quelli con altre maniere di versi soavemente cantando." Pettinari, pg. 224.

<sup>94</sup> "Essi per aventura diranno che i versi non sono buoni, o che troppi ve ne sono de' pastorali, o che da troppi è stata una medesima trattata, o che troppe cose sono state tolte dal latino overo che non ci sono tutte le maniere de' versi che da' greci e latini poeti si veggiono usate." Pettinari, pg. 225.

<sup>95</sup> Dated 24 January, 1540. *Lettere di diversi autori*, 1556, pg. 343.

<sup>96</sup> Varchi, in 1554, writes: "ancora oggi quando sono stati da tutto il mondo apertamente rifiutati e derisi, non pure li difende, ma li celebra, gli ammira e mette innanzi a tutti gli altri M. Claudio solo, chiamando coloro,

the conventions of vernacular poetry. Tolomei's obsessive need to justify the sound of his own poems was perhaps already an indicator of such failure. Regardless of the cooling enthusiasm, later writers continued to cite him in conjunction with attempts at developing an epic form in the vernacular.

### 2.3.3 *Poetry vs. Prose*

Tolomei thus represents another direction for attempts to reproduce classical forms in the vernacular. While someone like Alamanni will rely mainly on alternating traditional vernacular forms with *verso sciolto*, Tolomei will invent an entirely new system of metrics. Throughout his texts, however, he constantly emphasizes the need to produce a sweet and harmonious sound, despite the relative strangeness of the verse form. But what about epic poetry? There are no extant documents from the 1530s detailing Tolomei's thoughts on this specific kind of poetry, but a letter from several years later elaborates on Tolomei's continued reliance on his own experimentations as perhaps the only valid form of epic available.

In a letter, dated July 1, 1543, Tolomei writes to the poet and translator Marcantonio Cinuzzi, who had recently printed a vernacular translation of Claudian's *De raptu Proserpinae* in *verso sciolto*. After praising Cinuzzi for introducing Claudian to those who cannot read Latin, Tolomei addresses the problem of the poem's meter: "io non so prima quanto mi piaccia la forma di questi versi sciolti, gli quali da molti s'usano per rappresentarci il verso Heroico Greco e Latino." He refers to other poets who have made use of *verso sciolto* to translate or emulate other classical authors, such as Alamanni and Trissino.<sup>97</sup> Yet, Tolomei feels that *verso sciolto* removes entirely the particular acoustic character of vernacular:

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che così non fanno non ignoranti, ma ostinati; quasi conoscano il vero, ma non vogliano o per invidia, o per malignità confessarlo." See Benedetto Varchi (1859). *Opere*. Ed. by A. Racheli. Vol. 2. Trieste: Lloyd Austriaco, pg. 719. Lilio Giraldi, in his *Modern Poets*, writes "In my judgment Claudio Tolomei from Siena would deserve to be placed among the leaders in this genre, had he not striven to impose the norms of ancient Latin verse on vernacular poetry. In this matter (or rather in this heresy!) he found many to follow him. (Esset et inter primos in hoc scribendi genere meo quidem iudicio repondendus Claudius Ptolemaeus Senensis, nisi vulgaria haec et vernacula ad antiquorum Latinorum normam revocare studuisset, qua in re, si non potius haeresi, multos invenit qui eum sequerentur)" (Section II.145). See Gregorio Lilio Giraldi (2011). *Modern poets*. Ed. by John Grant. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, pp. 192-193.

<sup>97</sup> "[S]i come furon già usati da M. Luigi Alamanni nel trasferir l'Epitalamio di Peleo e Tetide, che fece Catullo, e da Lodovico Martelli nel tradurre il quarto libro de l'Eneide di Virgilio; dal quale invitato l'Ill. S. Hippolito Cardinal de' Medici con la medesima forma trasferì il secondo, gli quali di poi sono stati da più ingegni ne la traduzion di varii libri imitati. e hora intendo che M. Giovan Giorgio Trissino con questa stessa via, scrive Heroicamente in molti libri le guerre che già fece Belisario in Italia." *Delle lettere* (1549). *Delle lettere di M. Claudio Tolomei libri sette*. Venice: Gabriel Giolito di Ferrarii, cc. 8r – 8v.

mi par che que versi sciolti, e dissipati, perdono il vigore, e lo spirito che gli avviva, non essendo ritenuti, non ristretti da nodo, o da legamento alcuno. e mi sovviene di quel che dice Aristotele ne la poetica, il qual loda molto il verso Hesametro atto a lo stile Heroico: perciò che quella sorte di verso, non cade così agevolmente nel parlar che l'huom fa tutte l'hore, come i versi senarii, e alcune altre simili forme. [...] onde se non son ritenuti, e ritardati da qualche legamento di rima, o d'altro artificio, non differiscono da la prosa, nè mi par che si facciano atti a lo stile Heroico.<sup>98</sup>

For Tolomei, the essential quality of vernacular poetry is the existence of some sort of vital link that connects lines together in some manner. In defense of this position, he cites Aristotle, although it is not clear whether or not he is referring to the *Poetics*, a text which has yet to be incorporated into discussions of meter.<sup>99</sup> The important aspect of his allusion to Aristotle is the insistence on a distinction between poetry and "everyday speech." The primary issue with *verso sciolto* is that it is almost indistinguishable for quotidian language, while poetry requires some sort of "knot" to tie together the verses.

Tolomei goes on to criticize *terza rima* as well, the verse form invented by Dante and employed by Petrarch. His first criticism returns the problem of narrative fluidity seen earlier in Trissino and Alamanni:

Nondimeno quella rima di terzo in terzo verso, arreca con se grande incomodità. Imperoché sempre par che richieda nel fin del terzetto il sentimento finito, e ove non si finisce, se non si sospende con molto giudizio, il poema ne diviene aspero, e duro, e con poca, o nissuna grazia: la qual cosa è in tutto inimica a lo stile Heroico, il quale hora stretto si raccoglie, hor largo si distende, e secondo che o la qualità del soggetto, o l'impeto de la Musa ci sforza, così o in breve giro si restringe, o in larghissimi campi trascorre.

The essential problem with *terza rima* is that it requires chaining the poet's conceit or thought ("il sentimento") to the three-verse structure. If a poet decides to ignore this alignment between syntax and meter, he ends up producing poetry that is "harsh," "hard," and "without grace." For Tolomei, true epic poetry requires syntactical flexibility, according to the greatness or smallness of the content.

Tolomei even takes issue with the use of hendecasyllable, which he finds restrictive compared with classical hexameter. He returns to the same notions of underlying musi-

<sup>98</sup> *Delle lettere*, 8v.

<sup>99</sup> This reference to the distinction between poetry and prose, and the relationship between hexameter and "unordinary" manners of speaking, appears in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, 1404a9: "Even the writers of tragedies do not employ [prose] in the same manner, but as they have changed from the tetrametric to the iambic metre, because the latter, of all other metres, most nearly resembles prose, they have in manner discarded all such words as differ from those of ordinary conversation, with which the early poets used to adorn their writings, and which even now are employed by the writers of hexameters." (1404a9-a10). See Aristotle (1926). *The "Art" of Rhetoric, with an English translation*. Trans. by J.H. Freese. London: William Heineman, pg. 349-351.



cality seen earlier in his Cesano and in his “new poetry,” an obsessive point which he himself jokingly brings up:

Ma perché pur il verso resta endecasillabo è corto, e non s'alza per se stesso, quasi corpo di piccola statura a la grandezza de l'heroico; però m'è parso (e così in coscienza vi dico) ch'a la dignità, ed altezza sua non si possa senza la gravità de l'Esametro arrivare, col quale i Greci, col quale i Romani poeti han sì nobile e divinamente poetizzato. Ne mi dite qui, che si come Aristosseno ogni cosa riferiva a l'arte sua de la musica, così io riduco ogni cosa a la mia invenzione, perch'io rinunzio ad ogni gloria che me ne possa seguire, pur che s'intenda, ed inteso s'abbracci il vero.<sup>100</sup>

For Tolomei, the problem with hendecasyllable is its inability to express the greatness, dignity, elevation, and “gravità” of classical hexameter. The same aesthetic terms seen in Daniello, Trissino, and Alamanni continue to appear, although the argumentation is quite different. Beyond doubting the use of regular rhyme schemes, Tolomei further calls into question the use of hendecasyllable, taken for granted by the other writers.

Tolomei's suggested means of achieving a properly epic language, style, and meter lies in taking up new forms, such as the ones that he has been experimenting with for the past twenty years:

per fuggir la troppa libertà di quei versi sciolti, e 'l troppo secco nodo di queste terze rime, io già più che vinti anni sono ritrovai certe catene, e certi collegamenti di rime variate, le quali ritenevano, o annodavano il verso con qualche spirito: ne però l'obbligavano a terminarsi in alcun luogo per forza, schifando insieme, e la licenza di quelli e la strettezza di queste altre. La qual invenzione è stata già pochi anni fa da alcuni poeti, o similmente ritrovata, o ver posta in maggior luce.<sup>101</sup>

Tolomei recommends using a meter that possesses some sort of “link” or “force” between verses, without requiring the poet to use the same rigid structure throughout. Such a metrical form does not necessarily require the strict use of hendecasyllable. This metrical structure also seems to differ from the experiments of the Accademia della Nuova Poesa. Rather than use a kind of quantitative structure, Tolomei seems to suggest using a rhyme scheme built on irregularly spaced rhymes with irregular verse lengths.

In addition to such an unusual rhyme scheme, it is also worth pointing out that Tolomei's larger aesthetic requirements of epic poetry derive from the principles of “clarity” (“chiarezza”) and “elevation” (“altezza”). For Tolomei, clarity derives from both choice of words and syntactical structure, which are directed at the pleasant and easy understanding of a

<sup>100</sup> *Delle lettere*, c. 9r.

<sup>101</sup> *Delle lettere*, cc. 8v - 9r.

poem's content. Likewise, elevation comes from the subject matter (which must be "alto e grande") and in the choice and arrangement of words. (10r). Unfortunately, Tolomei does not explain this quality of "elevation," which seems to be fundamental to understanding the epic aesthetic for all of the writers we have seen so far.

Instead, Tolomei focuses on the issue of clarity, which he posits as the essence of good poetry. The precise location of clarity is, ironically, unclear, and Tolomei appears to find it variously in the syntax, sound, and content of a work. He constructs a series of aesthetic characteristics opposed to clarity, including the undesirable features of "obscurity," "complexity," and "harshness":

[La chiarezza] io vorrei che fusse sempre lucente, non oscura, non intrigata, non isforzata, non interrotta, non aspra, non isquarciata, ma chiara, sciolta, libera, corrente, piacevole, unita: e che 'n somma, sì come il Sol, quanto maggior di tutti gli altri lumi, tanto si mostra più chiaro; così le scritture, quanto son più nobili, e più eccelse de l'altre, tanto fussen più aperte e più illustri.<sup>102</sup>

Tolomei writes that this emphasis on clarity might seem strange to others, as "clear speaking" ("il parlar chiaro") is generally associated with low and vulgar ("basso e volgare") speech.<sup>103</sup> As a result, Tolomei finds that poets, misunderstanding the difference between clarity and vulgarity, attempt to elevate their own works through an overwrought and overly artificial language: "onde essi per alzar lo stile ritrovano nuovi aggiramenti, e storcimenti di parole, li quali non ingrandiscono, ma intrigano, non innalzano, ma involuppano cio che si dice [...] e quella parte ch'essendo chiara sarebbe grande, quando ella è così fosca e intrigata si converte in asprezza."<sup>104</sup>

In fact, Tolomei constantly constructs a distinction between poetry that is clear—and therefore elevated and sweet—and poetry that is artificial—and harsh.<sup>105</sup> He applies this same dichotomy of language and aesthetic effect to all styles of poetic language:

Così ne li stili, quando queste due virtù [di chiarezza e dolcezza] vi si veggono accompagnate, fanno in non so che raro modo, una grande, e dolce armonia insieme. il che mi par haver gustato ne vostri versi, così e grandi e dolci mi son paruti; conciosia che alzandosi han fuggito il vizio de l'aspro, e addolcendosi hanno schifato il mancamento de l'humile.<sup>106</sup>

<sup>102</sup> *Delle lettere*, cc. 9r – 9v.

<sup>103</sup> *Delle lettere*, c. 10r.

<sup>104</sup> *Delle lettere*, c. 10r. This sentiment is echoed later by Giraldis, as we will see in the next chapter. It is unclear which poets Tolomei refers to here. In fact, we will continue to find traces of various antagonistic artistic sensibilities throughout, although often no poets are named.

<sup>105</sup> "Aggiungesi a la grandezza una altra virtù, la qual la fa sommamente maravigliosa; imperoché con l'esser grande ella è insieme anchor dolce, il qual legamento è rarissimo in tutte le cose humane; perché ordinariamente la grandezza gonfia a superbia, sì come per lo contrario la dolcezza abbassa ad humiltà. Ma colui che può trovar questo temperamento d'haver co la dolcezza il grande, e co la grandezza il dolce, egli certo si può dir d'haver fatto il più bel nodo che si possa veder mai." *Delle lettere*, c. 10v.

<sup>106</sup> *Delle lettere*, c. 10v.

In other words, Tolomei's ideal poetry always involved a combination of harmony and sweetness. His view of epic poetry is similarly directed towards a language and a style that is elevated merely because it clearly depicts its great subject matter. Unfortunately, in his letter to Cinuzzi, there are few practical examples to explain these terms, despite the consistency in vocabulary. These last points about style in general are important for understanding Tolomei's larger linguistic project, which determines his views of meter.

Despite advocating for complete metrical experimentation, Tolomei's general position in his letter highlights the same problems that appeared in Daniello's dialogue and Trissino's own theorization: namely the problem of rhyming with a set structure, which restricts the movement of the poet. Yet, unlike Trissino, Tolomei finds *verso sciolto* to possess too much freedom in its movement, due specifically to a lack of internal harmonious coherence. This principle of harmony—derived from clarity and simplicity in contrast to difficulty, artificiality, and harshness—also determines his larger aesthetic preferences. Yet, as we have seen, such harmony differs quite substantially from that of Daniello. Instead, it is based on a unique conception of the vernacular as grounded in Latin rhythms.

Ultimately, Tolomei's vision of implementing new vernacular meters based on classical patterns would fail. Nevertheless, his influence would be important for later discussions of epic. Indeed, Tolomei's experimentations would influence Bernardo Tasso, who would develop his own form of metrical experimentation, one based more in traditional vernacular poetry than in "recovering" classical sounds. Tolomei even refers to Bernardo in his letter to Cinuzzi, when referring to the metrical experimentation carried out in his academy. Tolomei claims that Bernardo in particular was a poet who managed to embellish this new form: "Certamente con molta grazia e giudizio l'hanno ed arricchita, e illustrata. Tra li quali M. Bernardo Tasso, huomo di pellegrino spirito, l'ha felicemente abbellita."

In the next section, we will then turn to look at Bernardo's contribution to the widening of the field of metrical possibilities for poets in the 1530s attempting to theorize, and write, an epic poem in the vernacular.

#### 2.4 BERNARDO TASSO AND NEW RHYME SCHEMES

Despite Tolomei's reference to Bernardo Tasso suggesting that the latter was also involved in similar experiments with quantitative meter, Bernardo himself will come to be recognized as the inventor of a particular metrical scheme structured around distant, almost

imperceptible rhyming patterns.<sup>107</sup> In fact, Bernardo will become a common point of reference for later discussions of a possible epic meter.<sup>108</sup> For these later authors, the unique quality of Bernardo's innovation lies in a new method for structuring verses with rhyme words set at the limits of acoustic intelligibility. Benedetto Varchi, in an academic lecture on poetry from 1554, will refer to Bernardo as the poet who perfected Tolomei's experimentation: "[le quali rime variate] con maggior animo usate e prodotte in luce da M. Bernardo Tasso, dove sono le rime, ma tanto lontane, che non si sentono."<sup>109</sup> Francesco Patrizi, in theorizing the metrical experimentation of his poem *L'Eridano* (1557), will write, "Fu il Tasso che ritrovò con la lontananza delle rime un certo mezo tra 'l rimato, & lo sciolto."<sup>110</sup>

Bernardo thus offers a potential—though unconventional—alternative for epic meter as early as the 1530s, one which will continue to appear within the field of possibilities throughout the rest of the century.<sup>111</sup> This meter will present an alternative both to newer methods, such as Tolomei's quantitative verses and Trissino's *verso sciolto*, as well as more traditional rhyme schemes, such as *terza rima* and, later, *ottava rima*. Given this theoretical importance and his own epic project beginning in the early 1540s, Bernardo presents an important point of reference for the long-standing question of the possibility of vernacular epic.

107 The most recent analysis of Bernardo's metrical and stylistic experimentation as a means of "renewing" the vernacular is Rosanna Morace (2015). «Del "rinovellare" la lingua volgare: i "Salmi" di Bernardo Tasso.» In: *I Cantieri dell'italianistica. Ricerca, didattica e organizzazione agli inizi del XXI secolo. Atti del XVII Congresso ADI, Roma, 18-21 settembre 2013*. Ed. by B. Alfonzetti, G. Baldassarri, and F. Tomasi. Rome: Adi editore, pp. 1–12. Bernardo had associations with other Italian poets in the Veneto experimenting with new forms, such as Antonio Brocardo; however, more work must be done in charting the various groups and networks of poets who positioned themselves against limited regularization (though often in the name of recuperating classical models). Yet it is also noteworthy that Bernardo met Bembo in Padua in the late 1520s and remained in correspondence with him. See Williamson, in particular pp. 41–44.

108 For a discussion and examples of Bernardo's metrical experimentation, see Guglielmo Barucci (2007). «Appunti per la ricerca metrica di Bernardo Tasso: il sonetto.» In: *Per Franco Brioschi: saggi di lingua e letteratura italiana*. Ed. by C. Milanini and S. Morgana. Milan: Cisalpino, pp. 161–172.

109 After discussing *terza rima*, *ottava rima*, and *verso sciolto*, Benedetto Varchi provides a succinct account of Tolomei: "Claudio Tolomei, già più volte ... per fuggire la troppa licenza e libertà dei versi sciolti, e schifare la secchezza, per così dire, e la strettezza delle terze rime ... ritrovò, sono già più anni, prima alcune catene e certi legamenti di rime variate." His opinion of Tolomei's novelty is rather negative: "Certo a noi pare ... che quelle fatiche, le quali non giovano all'anima, o non diletano il corpo, e brevemente che non sono necessarie, nè utili, siano tutte soverchie, e possono più tosto essere scusate alcuna volta, che lodate." See Varchi, *Opere*, II, pg. 719.

110 See Francesco Patrizi (1557). *L'Eridano in nuovo verso heroico di Francesco Patritio con i sostentamenti del detto verso*. Ferrara: Francesco de Rossi da Valenza, c. Ei.r.

111 The seriousness with which later poets will consider Bernardo's rhyme schemes is debatable. Most likely he offers a point of contrast to be refuted, such as with Patrizi, or simply a curious moment to note for encyclopaedic personalities like Varchi. In other words, virtually no one actively claims to follow Bernardo in his use of oddly spaced rhyme schemes.

Unlike the other authors analyzed thus far, Bernardo does not offer any sustained theoretical discussion on the language question. Despite being roughly the same age as both Claudio Tolomei and Luigi Alamanni, he did not participate actively in early debates on the *questione della lingua*, nor did he engage with intellectual circles of the same calibre as the Orti Oricellari in Florence. In fact, Bernardo is perhaps the only writer of the group under consideration that earned his living as a courtier and a poet.<sup>112</sup> In what follows, we will look at Bernardo's defense of "distant rhymes" in the preface of his early published works of lyric poetry. Through an analysis of this "apologia," we can reconstruct Bernardo's approach to the issue of elevating the vernacular through experimenting with rhyme schemes in order to reproduce classical forms. Much like with the other authors we have seen, Bernardo focuses on issues of sound, relying on familiar aesthetic categories such as classical *gravitas* in opposition to vernacular sweetness. Of the positions seen thus far, Bernardo's solution of "distance rhymes" offers the clearest compromise between adhering to vernacular forms and striving for innovating based on classical models.

Unlike his contemporaries, Bernardo Tasso will also undertake an epic poem at the behest of his patron, Ferrante Sanseverino. His attempt at epic will set the stage for later theoretical debates among poets and writers that will pit highly erudite theories of epic against the growing popularity of chivalric romance. This new opposition will be based not so much on theory as on contemporary taste and practice.

#### 2.4.1 *Ancients vs. Moderns*

Born in Venice in 1493, Bernardo Tasso spent the first decades of the sixteenth century moving between various courts in northern Italy, dedicating himself mainly to writing poetry for his patrons.<sup>113</sup> In 1532, he entered into the service of Ferrante Sanseverino, moving to the Spanish-controlled Bay of Naples to serve as secretary and court poet.<sup>114</sup> By

<sup>112</sup> Alamanni could also be characterized as a poet struggling for patronage, though he found much more favorable conditions after moving to France, even despite his brief return to Florence after the brief ousting of the Medici. For a biography of Bernardo, see Edward Williamson (1951). *Bernardo Tasso*. Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura. Torquato will remember his father in his *Apologia*, saying "mio Padre, il quale nondimeno fece professione di Cortegiano, non di Poeta, & le sue proprie lodi furono quelle, che egli meritava in corte." *Apologia* (1585). *Apologia del s. Torquato Tasso in difesa della sua Gierusalemme liberata : con alcune altre opere, parte in accusa, parte in difesa dell' Orlando Furioso dell' Ariosto, della Gierusalemme istessa e dell' Amadigi del Tasso padre*. Mantova: Francesco Osanna, pg. 4. Cited also in Williamson, *Bernardo Tasso*, pg. 35.

<sup>113</sup> He was first under the patronage of Guido Rangoni, then within the circles of Renata d'Este.

<sup>114</sup> The political choices of Sanseverino ultimately led to catastrophe for Bernardo, as his patron chose to side with the French following the eruption of war between Charles V and Francis I. As a result, Bernardo went

this time, he had already begun experimenting successfully with the metrical structures of lyric poetry, attempting to imitate classical forms such as the elegy and the pastoral.<sup>115</sup> In the early 1540s, he began composing an epic poem, the *Amadigi*, which he would continue to work on until its first printing in 1560. Innovations in lyric poetry, however, would remain Bernardo's greatest claim to fame, and he was the first to introduce several classical forms into the vernacular: he was the first to write "piscatory" eclogues in the vernacular (though he may share this title with Berardino Rota); he was the first to write a vernacular epithalamium, modelled on Catullus; and he was the first to translate Ovid's story of Pyramus and Thisbe into a vernacular "favola."<sup>116</sup>

His early theoretical statements about poetry appear in the prefaces of his earliest lyrical works, where he was already experimenting with translating classical metrical forms into the vernacular. His first book of poetry, *Libro primo de gli amori di Bernardo Tasso* (1531), immediately presents a poet attempting to set himself apart from the growing ranks of Petrarchist poets then following the model of Pietro Bembo.<sup>117</sup> In the prefatory letter dedicated to Ginevra Malatesta, Bernardo writes that he has conceived of a larger project of three books of poetry, all of which will help elevate the vernacular based on the imitation of classical genres. He explains that the first book, however, is merely an imitation of "modern Provençal poets and Petrarch" ("de' moderni provenzali e di messer Francesco Petrarca"). Despite this declaration of adherence to conventional vernacular forms, Bernardo claims that he has also included several poems based on classical models. In fact, he says that classical poets offer the most sure method for establishing an erudite literary canon, one which has no obligations to the rigid formal rules of the vernacular:

et hovvi [...] aggiunto alcune altre poche rime, cantate secondo la via e l'arte degli antiqui poeti greci e latini, i quali sciolti d'ogni obligazione, cominciavano e fornivano i loro poemi come a ciascun meglio pare, massimamente quelli che d'amorosi soggetti ragionano, e ch'hanno similitudine co' volgari, come sono epigrammi, ode et elegie.<sup>118</sup>

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into exile from Naples and spent the rest of his life in the service of various courts, such as the d'Este in Ferrara and the Gonzaga in Mantova.

<sup>115</sup> It is likely that Bernardo's early interest in experimentation gave way to more practical concerns, namely earning the praise (and money) of his patrons through his work. As a result, much of his oeuvre consists of occasional poems, poems of praise, and similar kinds of verse. He never returns with the same energy to discussing potential methods of imitating classical forms. See Williamson for a more summary description.

<sup>116</sup> For a list of Bernardo's literary feats, see Williamson, *Bernardo Tasso*, pp. 60-64.

<sup>117</sup> See Giulio Ferroni (2011). «Come leggere 'I tre libri degli Amori' di Bernardo Tasso.» In: *Quaderno di italianistica a cura della Sezione di Italiano dell'Università di Losanna*. Pisa: ETS, pp. 99-144; and Giulio Ferroni (2007). «Note sulla struttura del 'Libro primo degli Amori' di Bernardo Tasso.» In: *Studi tassiani* 54, pp. 39-74.

<sup>118</sup> *Libro primo*, pp. 2r-2v.

Bernardo does not elaborate on the specific nature of the “path” and “art” of classical authors, although he does admire their “ampia licenzia.” Instead, he will only offer a few examples of modernized classical forms, with the hope that he will be able to “make old things new” and “give authority to new matters” (“E quantunque malagevolmente si possa delle cose vecchie far nove, et alle nove dar autorità, nondimeno ho voluto pur tentare”).<sup>119</sup> Even in this early statement, Bernardo articulates a clear vision of vernacular poetry that sees classical literature as both a model and a competitor. The issue is not merely of reproducing the works of Antiquity, but of legitimizing vernacular letters, which has remained implicitly trapped under the influence of the Provençal troubadours and Petrarch. This position echoes the statements made by Alamanni in his *Opere toscane*, published that same year. In practice, however, both poets also demonstrate the potential range of the vernacular by emulating classical forms.

Bernardo’s drive to emulate and reproduce the style of classical poetry appears in the content of the poetry itself. In a sonnet dedicated to Antonio Brocardo, also known for his poetic experimentation, Bernardo remarks that he has followed the former poet’s example:

L’orme seguendo del tuo sacro ingegno,  
 [...] scorgo del vero stil l’ antiquo segno,  
 ch’ alza la fama altrui sovr’ ogni stella,  
 non noto ancor a quest’ età novella,  
 a cui salir quanto posso m’ ingegno.<sup>120</sup>

Thus as early as 1531, we find a poet openly declaring his intention to follow the “true style” of classical poetry, despite its absence in the “new age.”<sup>121</sup> This sonnet, together with another dedicated to an indeterminate “donna immortal,” closes the entire volume, suggesting that Bernardo’s ambition lies beyond simply reproducing another Petrarchan *canzoniere*. Bernardo thus sets himself up as a poetic innovator bridging the gap between the ancients and the moderns.

<sup>119</sup> *Libro primo*, pg. 3r.

<sup>120</sup> *Libro primo*, pg. 56r, vv. 1; 5-8. The identity of Brocardo is not made explicit until the final printing of all five books. See *Rime di B. Tasso* (1560). *Rime di messer Bernardo Tasso divise in cinque libri nuovamente stampate*. Venice: Gabriel Giolito de’ Ferrari, pg. 42.

<sup>121</sup> In reality, Brocardo had died by the time of publication of Bernardo’s work. In the preface, Bernardo also claims that Brocardo had urged him to publish his experimental works, “Né pensate ch’io fosse stato sì prosuntuoso che l’avessi publicate giamai, se prima molti letterati uomini, e ben intendenti di poesia, non me l’avessero persuaso; e specialmente quella ben nata e felice anima di messer Antonio Brocardo, che ‘n questi di con universal danno et infinito dispiacere d’ogni spirito gentile immaturamente passò di questa vita.” *Libro primo*, pg. 3r.

Yet it is not until the publication of the second book of his lyric poetry in 1534 that Bernardo offers a much fuller account of his approach to innovating vernacular metrical schemes.<sup>122</sup> The preface to this second work, dedicated to his new patron Sanseverino, offers a more thorough discussion of his poetic experimentation. Bernardo begins, however, much in the same manner as other poets who apologize for the unconventional sounds of their work: “Porto fermissima opinione, illustrissimo Signor mio, che la novità de’ miei versi, cosa non meno invidiosa che dilettevole, moverà molti a vituperarli: e di questa novella tela altri le fila, altri la testura biasimerà, parendoli forse mal convenirsi alla lingua volgare.”<sup>123</sup>

Bernardo justifies the novelty of his poetry with two main points. First, he emphasizes the need for modern poetry to adapt only a certain range of classical lyrical forms, namely eclogues, hymns, and odes. Second, it is only by first moulding the vernacular to accommodate these ostensibly simpler genres of lyric poetry that modern poets can hope to elevate the vernacular in the future.<sup>124</sup> In other words, Bernardo echoes the same sentiment seen in Alamanni’s *Opere toscane*, the preface to Tolomei’s *Nuova poesia toscana*, and even Daniello’s *Poetica*: if modern poets wish to equal classical literature, they cannot begin with genres such as epic. Instead, they must ground their work in “foundational” forms, such as pastoral.<sup>125</sup>

Unlike the earlier preface that simply states the presence of various classically-inspired poems, Bernardo here presents his two volumes of lyric poetry as the basis upon which future poets will construct the noble edifice of a vernacular literature, which will rival the works of Antiquity:

altri per aventura di maggior virtute ch’io non son io sorgerà dopo me, il  
quale con non minor utilità della lingua volgare che con onor di se stesso  
l’opra al volere uguaglierà, dando a dividedere alle gemi la poesia degli antichi,

<sup>122</sup> A third book of poetry, printed in 1537, was dedicated to Ippolita Pallavicina and contains no new poetic reflection. A fourth book was printed in 1555, and a fifth in 1560, although, like the third book, they do not provide further theoretical declarations. For a description of Tasso’s lyrical project, see Williamson, pp. 33-89.

<sup>123</sup> Cited in *Tre libri* (1555). *I tre libri de gli Amori di Bernardo Tasso*. Venice: Gabriel Giolito de’ Ferrari, pg. 3.

<sup>124</sup> “[O]gni buono et approvato artificio fu debile e frale cosa sul cominciare, et ove un picciol raggio della ragione ci mostri il camino, ivi dietro a sua guida sicuramente e senza paura di biasimo si potemo inviare.” *Tre libri*, pg. 4.

<sup>125</sup> In general, Bernardo refuses to follow the traditional models for vernacular poetry. He concedes that Petrarch and Dante are central to the vernacular project; yet, he also feels that poets must not only emulate these “lumi della lingua toscana [...] Ma avendo que’ gloriosi con un loro raro e leggiadro stile volgare sì altamente ritratti i lor divini concetti che impossibile sarebbe oggimai con quelli istessi colori depinger cosa che ci piacesse, vana mi parrebbe ogni fatica ch’io usassi, non pur per passar avanti, ma per andarli vicino, caminando di continuo dietro forme loro.” *Tre libri*, pg. 6. Instead, he points to the importance of classical models for those “foundational” genres, such as Virgil, Theocritus, and Horace.



colta dalle mani moderne, esser atta a rinovellarsi fra noi di fiori e di frutti  
d'altrettanta bellezza di quanta Roma o Atene gli producesse giamai.<sup>126</sup>

Bernardo thus sees his work as the establishing of new possible metrical configurations, which will be further perfected by later poets of "greater virtue." He also offers perhaps the most explicit statement on a possible competition between the ancients and moderns. According to Bernardo, not only will vernacular poets recover the "gems" of classical poetry, but modern works will possess "just as much beauty" ("altrettanta bellezza").

Central to Bernardo's project is the revaluation of vernacular rhyme, both as a compositional obstacle and as an issue for modern culture in general. In fact, Bernardo wants to promote a new manner of listening to poetry, one which forces the listener to attend less to the mere repetition of sounds. According to Bernardo, using rhymes with every subject matter is improper, and such sounds become a "puerile ornamento." Instead, poets should be allowed to "hide" their rhymes either by introducing more lines of separation or by placing the rhyme in the middle of the verse—effectively surprising the listener:

[P]erché non così a' volgari può esser lecito asconder alcuna volta ne' versi loro la rima, e quella fra le altre parole mischiare in maniera che prima ella ci trappassi l'orecchie ch'uom s'accorga di doverla incontrare? specialmente tale essendo il soggetto, che men male per aventura sarebbe tutto affatto di così puerile ornamento spogliarlo, che trop-po adorno di parolette e di rime lasciarlo vedere?<sup>127</sup>

Bernardo thus offers two possible means of disrupting a conventional rhyme scheme in order to reproduce more properly classical forms. It is clear that he also wishes to produce new effects in listening to and reading poetry. Not only does this new form present unexpected sounds, but Bernardo also hopes that listeners will begin to focus less on the correspondence between the rhymes and more on the pleasantness ("vaghezza") of the words themselves and the *gravitas* of the ideas:

E Dio volesse che i duo versi dimezzo senza altra loro armonia, e con la vaghezza delle parole e con la gravità delle sentenzie, come alla materia più dicevole fosse, di maniera ci addolcissero, che d'udir la rima del quarto il desiderio, ci facessero dimenticare: che maggior loda me ne spererei che di cosa, ch'io facessi giamai.<sup>128</sup>

The implication is that modern listeners prefer to focus on the harmony of rhymes, rather than on the content of the poem. Of the three components of a poem that one could attend to while listening (the beauty of the words, the gravity of the thoughts, and the

<sup>126</sup> *Tre libri*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>127</sup> *Tre libri*, pg. 13.

<sup>128</sup> *Tre libri*, pg. 14.

harmony of the rhymes), he recognizes that his contemporaries focus almost exclusively on harmony. In fact, Bernardo goes on to claim that there are essentially two modes of listening to poetry, one “ancient” and the other “modern”: “[L]a colpa, di che gli udimo accusare è solamente una usanza, ond’ha il mondo in costume di molto più intentamente le composizioni degli antichi ascoltare e gradire ch’egli non fa de’ moderni.”<sup>129</sup> In other words, listening to ancient poetry is viewed with more seriousness and gravity, while the consumption of vernacular poetry is generally a less dignified matter.

Bernardo attributes this inability to appreciate—and implicitly, to produce—more profound substance in modern vernacular poetry to the popular origin of rhyming. According to Bernardo, harmony in general is an essential component of all poetry; however, rhyme has acquired a disproportionate weight in vernacular poetry due to the history of the “volgari operazioni” of dancing, singing, and music.<sup>130</sup> In fact, he claims that rhyme is nothing more than a simple ornament of language, rather than an essential characteristic.<sup>131</sup> This reference to the more “popular” sources of rhyming echoes Alamanni’s own rejection of the “mal fondata usanza” in Italian poetry arising from imitation of Provençal troubadours. For both Alamanni and Bernardo, the task of modern vernacular poets is to distance themselves from their own traditions by turning towards classical literature. While Alamanni sought to reproduce such literature through the complete elimination of rhyme, Bernardo offers a more subtle transformation, in which rhyme remains, yet occurs at unexpected intervals. As an example, we can look at a *selva* written on the death of Luigi Gonzaga in the second book of Bernardo’s *Tre libri de gli amori*.

Voi meco fuor de l’acque fresche e vive,  
de’ vostri cristallini antri e muscosi,  
Ninfe del picciol Ren, voi meco a paro,  
degli usati dilette al tutto schive,  
piangete il gran Luigi, e con pietosi  
accenti accompagnate il duolo amaro:  
così non sian di verdi erbe o di fiori  
unqua spogliate dal caldo o dal gelo  
le vostre rive, e ’l puro fondo e chiaro  
turbato da la pioggia o da’ pastori.<sup>132</sup>

<sup>129</sup> *Tre libri*, pp. 14–15.

<sup>130</sup> “[P]er certo l’armonia delle Muse e d’Apollo, ond’ha il verso la sua eccellenza, non deve poter esser cosa sì proporzionata e si nota all’orecchie del volgo come è la rima, la quale, se alle prime composizioni della lingua toscana si guarderà, a niuno altro fine giudicheremo che si formasse, che a ballare, cantare e sonare con esso lei, dalle quali tre nostre assai basse e volgari operazioni questi tre nomi, cioè ballata, canzona e sonetto, si derivano.” *Tre libri*, pp. 17–18.

<sup>131</sup> “[C]redo con Cicerone la rima non esser altro che un ornamento del dire.” *Tre libri*, pg. 16.

<sup>132</sup> This poem can be found in *Tre libri*, pg. 189. The text has been taken from Bernardo Tasso, *Rime*, ed. by D. Chiodo, V. Martignone. Turin: RES, 1995. Accessed online Biblioteca italiana.

In this poem, no rhyme occurs less than four lines apart. Indeed, this particular rhyme scheme continues for over 200 lines before ending with a rhymed couplet. As a result, the pleasant jingle of the rhyme words is almost entirely absent throughout the lengthy composition.

In cases such as this, Bernardo's innovation is quite simple: he wants to construct a metrical scheme in which at least two lines separate rhyme words. In the preface, he writes that this structure stretches lines beyond their conventional usage ("oltre il loro costume"), yet he also justifies such experimentation by referring to Dante. According to Bernardo, *terza rima* is based on the closing tercets of a sonnet, and he has simply repeated this exercise by looking to the quatrain.

He states, however, that this form has led some of his earlier readers to claim that his poetry lacks the necessary musicality: "ad alcuni giudiciosi e grand'uomini paiono privi i miei versi non altrimenti che se mute fossero le note loro."<sup>133</sup> Such a negative reaction seems to anticipate Daniello's complaint in the *Poetica* concerning a form of poetry that "confounds the sense of hearing." Nevertheless, Bernardo insists on the need to institute new conventions, a point made most clearly through the continued use of the metaphor of youth and old age: the vernacular is a "giovane lingua"; rhyme is twice called "puerile"; the notion of producing "gentilezza" is described in terms of helping the language "grow up" [allevare]. In contrast to the youthfulness of the vernacular is the severity and profundity of classical literature. Bernardo elaborates on these two stages with a reference to two classical orators, Isocrates and Hortensius:

Ma che vo io contemplando ne gli altrui sembianti questa cotal verità? se Isocrate et Hortensio, duo chiari lumi dell' antica eloquentia, nell'eta giovanile miglior oratori di se stessi già vecchi fur reputati: e ciò fu, per esser l'orationi di quelli troppo numerose, e più dolci, ch'alla gravità dell'età loro si richiedesse.<sup>134</sup>

Bernardo thus offers another example of the continuing discussion concerning the opposition between youthful sweetness (or overly rhythmical poetry) and mature *gravitas*. His goal is to begin to set the stage for later vernacular writers to construct metrical forms that escape the youthful energy of rhyme.

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<sup>133</sup> *Tre libri*, pg. 10.

<sup>134</sup> *Tre libri*, pg. 17.

2.4.2 *The Dream of Hexameter*

The positions offered by these early prefaces from 1531 and 1534 suggest a poet mindful of the twin pressures of a strong desire to elevate a language and the prevailing taste of a growing literary community. Bernardo consistently returns to the opinions of his peers as a influential factor in his theory of poetry and in his practical choices. Such a lack of complete satisfaction also appears in his brief statements made about heroic poetry and hexameter.

Aside from defending his own practice of displacing rhymes, Bernardo also writes that, of the various elements to imitate in classical authors, a central issue is the reproduction of hexameter. Much like the other authors we have seen, he praises this classical meter the specific reason that it allows for the continuous movement of thought: “di continuo camminando con egual passo, ove e quando gli piace fornisce il suo cominciato viaggio.” As a result, it is clear that, for Bernardo, rhyme continues to be problematic because it forces the poet to structure his ideas around the placement of end words that must contain certain syllables. He also makes the point that hexameter was such a flexible form that classical poets were able to use it to move through the spectrum of genres found in the *rota Virgilii*: eclogues, georgics, and epic.<sup>135</sup>

The creation of such a form, which has remained conspicuously absent in vernacular literature, appears to be Bernardo’s ultimate goal. He even admits that he has attempted unsuccessfully to develop a vernacular version:

Di questo [verso] adunque essendo finora mancata la nostra lingua moderna, e d’adornarvela procurando, longamente sono stato, e sono ancora intra due, però che la forma a tal fine da me novellamente ritrovata non m’aggrada del tutto, né le ragioni ch’altri l’adduce in contrario la mi puon far dispiacere.<sup>136</sup>

Unlike the other authors, Bernardo has yet to decide on which vernacular form best corresponds to hexameter. In fact, he also seems to agree with several of his peers who have criticized his early attempts.

These doubts about the creation of vernacular hexameter lead to a brief discussion of epic poetry. Although he does not present his views as a position within an ongoing debate, there are clearly traces of the same issues that will be articulated more explicitly in Daniello’s *Poetica* two years later. Bernardo offers an implied criticism of both *verso*

<sup>135</sup> “Con questo [verso] felicemente cantò Omero gli eroi, Esiodo l’agricoltura, e Teocrito i suoi pastori; con questo la lingua latina non solamente ebbe ardir di parlar di cotai cose, ma quelle medesime sparse e divise fra i poemi di Grecia mirabilmente unio e raccolse nel suo Virgilio.” *Tre libri*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>136</sup> *Tre libri*, pg. 12.

*sciolto* and *terza rima*, which are inadequate for the expression of epic narrative. Although he does not explicitly refer to blank verse, Bernardo reflects on his failed attempts to reproduce hexameter:

Non negherò il verso esser endecasillabo e non exametro, ma tutto che d'allungarlo e di renderlo al numero di quello più simile che si potesse mi sia affaticato, non ho potuto giamai quella forma darli che già nell'animo fabricata m'avea, sì che più tosto numero di prosa non avesse che di verso.<sup>137</sup>

It is clear that, in Bernardo's view, overly prosaic verse form fails to produce a sound that is sufficiently "poetic" ("di verso"). Doubtless if his attempts to shorten or lengthen the hendecasyllable resulted in such an unsatisfying form, then the entire removal of rhyme would likewise produce the same results. Such a position echoes Tolomei's own condemnation of *verso sciolto*, seen earlier, where he writes of the lack of a poetic "nodo."

Bernardo's rejection of *terza rima* follows the same logic seen earlier, namely that the proximity of rhymes—occurring every two lines—produces a "childish" sound that merely entices the ears:

[C]hi potrà dire con verità che una consonanzia di rima la quale di continuo ad ogni due versi ci lusinghi l'orecchie, numero veramente anzi puerile che no, nell'egloga e nell'eroico ancora, e nell'eroico istesso in diversi propositi, narrando, disponendo e movendo, si convegna osservare?<sup>138</sup>

We return to the central issue seen elsewhere in the other authors, namely that of pleasant sounds proving to be a distraction from the movement of narrative.

Although Bernardo does not provide any definitive solutions to this problem, it is perhaps no coincidence that he groups pastoral and heroic poetry together. Not only do both genres employ hexameter in classical languages, but they are also considered narrative forms. According to Bernardo, despite the obvious differences between heroic feats ("gesti eroici") and pastoral simplicity ("semplicità pastorale"), rhyme is equally unsuitable.<sup>139</sup> Implied in this coupling of epic and pastoral is therefore the hope that Bernardo's current collection of poetry, which contains specifically pastoral works, will also serve as the narrative foundation for the later development of epic forms. Indeed, Bernardo writes that, despite his dissatisfaction with his own imitation of hexameter, he hopes that the rhyme schemes found in his collection will function as a provisional substitute until a more "ingenious" poet comes along: "di questa testura ritrovare mi

<sup>137</sup> *Tre libri*, pg. 12.

<sup>138</sup> *Tre libri*, pg. 17.

<sup>139</sup> "[C]osì come una voce, un portamento medesimo, ad eteri, ad effetti et a sessi diversi non si conviene, così ancora con una forma di rima i gesti eroici e la semplicità pastorale descrivere pare cosa lontana d'ogni ragione." *Tre libri*, pp. 16-17.

diede cagione, la qual ricevendo quelle parti che 'l verso da sé di ricevere o non è o non seppi far capace, forse potrà servir per exametro, fin che più elevato ingegno trovando di meglio, più perfetto ornamento a questa lingua aggiungerà."<sup>140</sup>

Though his approach to establishing a groundwork for future generations of poets appears similar to the statements found in Daniello, Alamanni, and Tolomei, Bernardo is nevertheless the poet most attuned to modern sensibilities. Unlike the other writers, he recognizes that one must conform to contemporary tastes or risk falling into obscurity. His preface is full of references to the opinions of his critics, which he ends up taking into consideration ("[non] mi puon far dispiacere"). Moreover, like Tolomei, he does not wish to remove rhyme entirely, despite its origin in more "popular" activities such as singing and dancing: "Questo sia detto da me, non ch'io odii la rima, e quella studi di biasimare, che non è forse men male il fuggirla che 'l seguirla, ma per l'amore ch'io porto alla nostra gentilissima lingua."<sup>141</sup> For Bernardo, rhyme is clearly an obstacle to producing a classicizing vernacular, yet it has become essential to contemporary literature.

Bernardo's decision to forego further experimentation due to unsatisfactory results distinguishes him from Trissino and Tolomei, both of whom recognized the radical qualities of their experimentations, yet refused to cede to the pressures of poor reception. Bernardo, on the other hand, limits the degree of his innovation, refraining from employing anything that strays too far from custom and usage. As a result, despite his various apologies for publishing poetry that may be unpleasant, Bernardo in fact seems closer to Daniello than either of the other writers. He is perhaps the most acutely aware of the available forms of Italian poetry, as well as the risks of poor reception with both his peers and his patrons due to experimentation. His solutions—namely the simple distancing of rhyme words—are thus elegant and simple, presented with the awareness of the process of literary evolution as a larger communal project.

Bernardo would continue to be recognized into the 1550s as a model for a new form of poetry, specifically one that still employs rhyming but limits the presence of distracting sounds.<sup>142</sup> It is also unsurprising then, that Daniello takes into consideration Bernardo's "distance rhymes" when describing the appropriate verse form to use when composing an epic poem. For Bernardo, the vernacular is still in its early stages of consolidation as

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<sup>140</sup> *Tre libri*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>141</sup> *Tre libri*, pg. 18.

<sup>142</sup> See Varchi, *Opere*, II, pp.

a viable literary tradition, yet he also recognizes the dangers of straying too far from the more popular techniques and strategies of poetic composition.<sup>143</sup>

#### 2.4.3 *Epic Ambitions*

Nowhere is Bernardo's awareness of contemporary taste more clear than in his statements describing the process of writing his own epic poem, the *Amadigi*. Though he would continue to use these novel metrical forms in his later volumes of lyric poetry, Bernardo's early attempts at composing his poem in the early 1540s were constrained by the desires of his patron, Ferrante Sanseverino. Although the work would not be printed until 1560, Bernardo was already working on, and worrying about, the form of the *Amadigi* in 1541.<sup>144</sup> In a letter from 1543 to the well-known intellectual Sperone Speroni in Padua, he writes that he has been working on organizing the subject matter; however, his principal concern has become the metrical form:

Non posso farlo [i.e. il poema], siccome vostro giudicio, e mio desiderio sarebbe, in rime sciolte, comandato dal padrone; al qual, vizio troppo grande sarebbe il mio, non ubbidire: ma è di mestieri farlo in Stanze.<sup>145</sup>

Of immediate interest is the fact that Bernardo has apparently, in the six years since the prefaces to his printed lyrical works, come to believe that *verso sciolto* was the most suitable meter for writing epic poetry. He has therefore rejected not only *terza rima*, as he did in the earlier preface, but also the same sort of metrical experimentation that he attempted in the early 1530s. He has abandoned his earlier concern that the lack of rhyme produces a form of poetry too close to prose.

Although Bernardo does not elaborate further on the distinctive characteristics of either form, it is important to emphasize the emergence of two diametrically opposed, though unequal, pressures that led to his decision to compose in a given meter. On the one

<sup>143</sup> More specifically, Bernardo defines the vernacular as a "young" language: "pietoso Uffizio sarebbe di ciascuno questa ancor giovane lingua per tutti que' sentieri menare che i Latini e i Greci le loro condussero, e la varietà de' fiori mostrandole de' quali l'altre due ornandosi sì vaghe si scopreno a' riguardanti, e come si colgano appurandole, a quella perfezione condurla che dal mondo si desidera, e nell'altre due si ammira. Alla qual cosa desideroso (quanto le debili forze del mio ingegno si estendono) donar compimento, novi et inusitati disegni fingendo, i peregrini eccellenti quanto ho saputo mi sono ingegnato d'imitare, sperando pur, che sì come altra volta le Muse di Grecia a' Latini di poetare insegnarono, così ora potesse avvenire che, quelle e queste di compagnia, vaghezza accrescessero alle volgari, la quale ci fosse a grado almeno non altrimenti che ne' sontuosi conviti, fra i cibi più delicati e più preziosi, frutto o altra vil cosa volentieri solemo gustare." *Tre libri*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>144</sup> In an early letter to Sperone Speroni from 1541, which we will discuss in the next chapter, Bernardo describes that he has already begun constructing the plot for his poem. See Bernardo Tasso (1733). *Delle lettere di M. Bernardo Tasso*. Ed. by Anton Federigo Seghezzi. Padua, pp. 168-171.

<sup>145</sup> *Delle lettere di B. Tasso*, I, pg. 169.

hand, there is the “intellectual” or “academic” judgment—represented by Speroni—who sees *verso sciolto* as the most appropriate form. On the other hand, there is the desire of Bernardo’s patron, Ferrante Sanseverino. This latter “pressure” has yet to appear in any of the discussions offered by previous authors, who are all largely autonomous intellectuals free to theorize about the possibilities of epic meter without worrying about their socio-economic status. It precisely due to this additional “voice” in the conversation on epic form that we now find a metrical scheme that has yet to appear in any of the previous texts, namely *ottava rima*.<sup>146</sup>

Although Bernardo does not justify his position to Speroni, in another letter to Luigi d’Avila from the same period, the poet elaborates on his belief in the suitability of *verso sciolto* for the expression of heroic “greatness” and “dignity”:

ho già cominciato [...] a comporre sopra la vaga, e leggiadra istoria d’Amadigi di Gaula un poema in lingua Italiana. E in vero, che non era mia volontà di farlo in Stanze; parendo a me (come a molti altri eziandì pare) che non sia rima degna, nè atta a ricever la grandezza, e dignità eroica.<sup>147</sup>

This formulation echoes Trissino’s and Alamanni’s justification for rejecting rhymed poetry. Bernardo even makes use of a similar language of suitability (“atta a ricever”) to characterize rhyme. Yet, in contrast to those earlier statements, Bernardo must also confront the new form of the *ottava rima*. We will address the appearance of this metrical form in the next chapter. For now, it is important to highlight that Bernardo relies on familiar terminology for rejecting rhyming, namely its inability to evoke *gravitas*, allow for narrative continuity, and offer compositional freedom:

[D]elle tre qualità che all’eroico si convengono, cioè gravità, continuazione, e licenza, la Stanza ne sia totalmente privata: nè si possa il poeta, avendo di due in due versi a rispondere alla rima, esser grave; impedito dalla vicinità della rima, la qual piuttosto causa dolcezza, che gravità: nè possa a sua voglia, come Virgilio, Omero, e gli altri buoni scrittori hanno fatto, con la clausula or lunga, or breve, come meglio gli torna comodo, andar vagando: anzi gli sarebbe necessario (se possibil fusse) di due in due versi la sentenza terminare: nè possa medesimamente, il suo cominciato viaggio continuando, quanto l’aggrada camminare, anzi gli sia necessario d’otto in otto versi, a guisa d’affaticato peregrino, riposarsi.<sup>148</sup>

This statement is perhaps the most succinct description of the epic problem so far. Bernardo recalls the same critical vocabulary found in Daniello and Alamanni, namely aes-

<sup>146</sup> *Ottava rima* does appear in the later editions to Trissino’s *Poetica* in 1548; however, in the earlier version from the late 1520s, “stanze” are only discussed as a lyrical form.

<sup>147</sup> *Delle lettere di B. Tasso*, I, pg. 198.

<sup>148</sup> *Delle lettere di B. Tasso*, I, pg. 198. The letter is sent to Sig. Don Luigi d’Avila from Sorrento. It is not dated, although it is doubtless from some point in 1542-43. See Williamson, *Bernardo Tasso*.



thetic categories (“gravità” vs. “dolcezza”) and descriptions of narrative (“continuazione”). As before, Bernardo relies on establishing two distinct spheres of poetic sensibilities. On the one hand, there is rhymed poetry, which produces sweetness, imposes rigid syntactical structures, and forces the poet to consider first the rhyme before the meaning. On the other hand, there is the proper meter of heroic poetry, exemplified by Virgil and Homer, which allows for both a given stylistic register, as well as true poetic freedom. Bernardo also elaborates more than earlier defenders of *verso sciolto* by referring specifically to the ability of the poet to restrict or expand the length of syntactic clauses to match a given conceit (“sentenza”). By contrast, *ottava rima* continuously forces the poet to consider not only two lines at a time for each “sentenza,” but also the larger structure of the octave. Nevertheless, despite his extensive theoretical justification for avoiding rhymed meter, Bernardo claims that he must ultimately conform to the desires of his patrons, both Ferrante Sanseverino and Luigi d’Avila: “Ma per compiacere al Sig. Principe mio, e a V.S. che con molta istanza lo mi comandò, io pur lo faccio.”<sup>149</sup>

Ultimately Bernardo will spend another eighteen years working on the poem, before finally printing it in 1560 in *ottava rima*. The reasons offered by both Bernardo and his editor, Dolce, will be taken into consideration in chapter 3, which will address larger problem in the 1540s of a growing taste for Ariostan *romanzi*. For now, let us recall the two stages of Bernardo’s considerations of imitating classical meter in the vernacular. Bernardo begins his career by focusing his energies on innovating specifically lyrical forms with the hope that he might provide the basis for evolving vernacular poetry. Although he writes a large amount of traditional vernacular poetry, following conventional “Provençal” and Petrarchan models, he also seeks more serious and classicizing forms, which avoid or diminish the “enticing” sounds of rhyme. He remains unsatisfied with his attempts to approximate classical hexameter. When he finally moves on to the composition of an epic poem, these concerns remain: epic must involve *gravitas* and compositional freedom, in opposition to the sweetness and restrictions of vernacular poetry. However he has also come to accept *verso sciolto* as the best option for composing a vernacular epic. In a later chapter we will continue to think about Bernardo’s situation by turning our attention to his interlocutor, Sperone Speroni, and his own attempts to incorporate classical forms into the vernacular.

Each of the authors analyzed thus shares a similar approach to vernacular poetry which is built on the assumption that the key to distinguishing between kinds of literature derives from identifying different subject matters and their attendant manners of expression.

<sup>149</sup> *Delle lettere di B. Tasso*, I, pp. 198-99.

The issue of subject matter seems largely uncomplicated for these authors, as opposed to later thinkers and poets who will begin to rely on a specifically Aristotelian conception of poetry. Rather than focus on narrative composition and structure, these early writers are concerned with the appropriate form that an epic poem should take in the vernacular, a language whose status is itself still in dispute. Although various authors will take into account general stylistic aspects such as diction, all of them prioritize the function of meter as a distinguishing generic feature. More specifically, they see dactylic hexameter as an essential component of classical epic poetry, and various alternatives are proposed for the proper adaptation of this metrical scheme in the vernacular. Each of these proposals necessarily takes into account the specifically vernacular feature of rhyme, which has now become problematic due to the perceived sweetness that it generates, which belongs to an aesthetic register antithetical to the expected *gravitas* of classical epic.

The first printed work that describes these alternatives as participating in an actual debate is Bernardino Daniello's treatise *Della poetica* from 1536. For the most part, this work reiterates and expands on the cultural literary project promoted by Pietro Bembo and Trifone Gabriele, who urge the imitation of exclusively vernacular models like Petrarch. However, it is also clear that the theme of war requires its own particular manner of poetic expression. He frames the problem of choosing epic form by focusing exclusively on the issue of selecting a proper metrical scheme, positioning himself against competing claims and establishing a clear field of opposing positions. Against these other options, he chooses *terza rima*, best exemplified by Dante's *Commedia* and Petrarch's *Trionfi*. He offers two main justifications: first, this metrical scheme preserves the use of rhyme, an essential quality of vernacular poetry that distinguishes it from classical literature. Second, the use of rhyme does not interfere with the apparently necessary characteristics of epic poetry, namely the presence of the aesthetic character of *gravitas* and the structural flexibility required for narrative movement.

Daniello's rejection of two other possible epic forms allows us to explore alternative possibilities, namely *verso sciolto* and unconventional or irregular rhyme schemes. *Verso sciolto*, is championed primarily by Luigi Alamanni and Giangiorgio Trissino. As a verse form, it allows for multiple kinds of poetry, following the example of classical poetry which is able to use hexameter to move through the entire *rota Virgilii*. Without the restricting presence of rhyme, a poet is capable of expanding or contracting his thought freely. The second rejected form—irregular rhymes—appears in the theorization and works of Claudio Tolomei and Bernardo Tasso. While both are ultimately more interested in setting

the stage for a developed vernacular literary culture, they also argue for the creation of a modern version of classical hexameter. Once more, hexameter appears to be a flexible meter that allows not only for more lyrical forms such as eclogue and elegy, but also more serious endeavors such as epic. For all of these authors, the principal concern appears to be rhyme, an essential feature of conventional vernacular poetry that produces a certain “sweet” sound that they find anathema to a properly “serious” epic aesthetic.

The arguments against rhyme and its origin take different forms in these authors. There are arguments against its use through reference to an erroneous custom begun by the Provençal troubadours (Alamanni) or claims of its vulgar origin in dancing and singing (Bernardo). They posit theoretical justifications for tempering it or eliminating it entirely. Such alternatives to conventional poetry call into question the unique nature of the vernacular itself: namely, the emphasis on pleasant sounds and a fixed metrical scheme. All of these authors posit that overemphasizing “harmony” or “sweetness” necessarily detracts from two essential qualities of epic: *gravitas* and narrativity. The pleasant sounds of rhyme distract from the necessarily serious matters of epic. Thus, the first problem is finding a proper “sound” to match to the material. Moreover, according to these writers, regular the rigid structure of vernacular rhyme schemes restricts the movement of the poet, who requires the freedom to expand or contract syntactic structure in order to properly narrate his story. These elements inform all early discussions of epic form, and they will continue throughout the majority of later developments, despite the introduction of Aristotle.

The focus on both of these aspects helps us understand conceptions of poetic composition in the early sixteenth century. The issues with narrative movement offer perhaps the clearest example of views on the creative process of writing poetry. It is clear that there is an assumed, virtually universal correspondence between a poetic conceit and the end of the verse; that is, there must be a rigid relationship between discrete syntactic units and metrical structure. Techniques such as enjambment, despite their occasional usage in Petrarch and Dante, or even other syntactical manipulation do not yet seem widely acceptable. As a result, the simplest solution to produce narrative freedom is simply the elimination of rhymes, as in the case of *verso sciolto*.

More difficult to define is the concept of *gravitas*, which appears to be used in two separate ways: first, as a reference to subject matter or to *sentenze*, such as gods, heroes, or war; second, as a mode of expression appropriate for such serious themes. Thus, not only the subject matter, but also the “verso” must be “alto e grave” or somehow evoke a sense

of “gravità, maestà, altezza.” Such judgments about the effect of certain kinds of poetic expression suggest a specific aesthetic range that needs to be taken into account, although the precise contents of that range are left ambiguous. Indeed, such statements about the *gravitas* of form are often made in two manners: either as a general judgment of suitability (i.e. a form “feels” appropriate to the theme), or by contrasting the aesthetic of *gravitas* with its opposite, which is almost always “sweetness” (“dolcezza”). Along these aesthetic lines there also fall the two literary traditions: classical literature provides not only serious themes, but a serious form—dactylic hexameter—capable of adapting itself to all situation. Vernacular literature appears based entirely on techniques of pleasant sounds, sweetness, and rigid structures. In other words, the lyrical foundation of vernacular is inimical to the longer, more serious narrative forms found in the common experience of reading classical texts.

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*Chiunque con nuova guisa di rime, o senza rima niuna, i Latini imitava, meno errava al mio parere. [...] La qual cosa sì provai io in quel tempo, quando, quasi nuovo alchimista, lungamente mi faticai per trovare l'eroico.*

—Antonio Brocardo in Sperone Speroni, *Dialogo della retorica*<sup>1</sup>

### 3.1 BETWEEN THE ACADEMY AND THE COURT

As stated previously, of the writers and poets who wish to move away from the conventionally pleasant sound of rhyme, Bernardo Tasso continues to offer the clearest statement in favor of blank verse. His letter in late 1542 to the Spanish courtier Luigi D'Avila provides a sophisticated defense of this metrical form, referring to concepts such as *gravitas* ("gravità"), narrative flexibility ("continuazione"), and artistic freedom ("licenza").<sup>2</sup> Despite his elaborate theoretical justification, Bernardo claims that he must nevertheless write his poem, the *Amadigi* in "Stanze," in the *ottava rima* of chivalric romance, due to the pressures of both his patron and D'Avila himself.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps it is due to his interlocutor's poetic preferences that Bernardo expounds so thoroughly on the virtues of *verso sciolto*. Regardless, his dissatisfaction with this metrical choice is evident.

This friction between Bernardo's intellectual certainty and the overriding preferences of the court appears in another letter dated August 20, 1543, in which Bernardo writes to the Paduan intellectual Sperone Speroni. Unlike in the letter to D'Avila, Bernardo does not offer any analysis of *verso sciolto*, spending the majority of the letter instead outlining

<sup>1</sup> Speroni, *Dialogo della retorica*, in Sperone Speroni (1740). *Opere*. Ed. by N. Delle Laste and M. Forcellini. Vol. 5 vols. Venice: Domenico Occhi, I, pg. 225.

<sup>2</sup> "[D]elle tre qualità che all'eroico si convengono, cioè gravità, continuazione, e licenza, la Stanza ne sia totalmente privata." In Bernardo Tasso (1733). *Delle lettere di M. Bernardo Tasso*. Ed. by Anton Federigo Seghezzi. Padua, pg. 198. It appears that, while in Ghent with Ferrante Sanseverino, two members of the Spanish court, Luis (Luigi) d'Avila and Francisco de Toledo, suggested to Bernardo that he write an Italian version of the stories of Amadis de Gaula. For a discussion of the period of composition of Bernardo's work, see Edward Williamson (1951). *Bernardo Tasso*. Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, pp. 99 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Bernardo writes that he will write in *ottava rima* "per compiacere al Sig. Principe mio, e a V.S. che con molta istanza lo mi comandò." *Delle lettere*, I, pp. 198-199.

his compositional process and asking for advice.<sup>4</sup> Yet, when he comes to the issue of the poem's meter, Bernardo laments that he will be unable to follow not only his own metrical preferences, but also Speroni's previous recommendation for blank verse: "Non posso farlo, siccome vostro giudicio, e mio desiderio sarebbe, in rime sciolte, comandato dal padrone; al qual, vizio troppo grande sarebbe il mio, non ubbidire: ma è di mestieri farlo in Stanze."<sup>5</sup> It is clear that Bernardo views Speroni as an intellectual peer who also understands the proper direction for future heroic poetry in the vernacular. Despite such convictions, the tastes of Bernardo's patron will ultimately determine the course of his work. With these two letters, Bernardo offers a portrait of a poet split between two competing visions of the vernacular literary world which were not immediately evident in the debates from the 1530s.

This tension between intellectual sophistication and capitulation to the tastes of his patron suggests a further development in the widening discussion on the correct way to translate classical forms into the vernacular. On the one hand, in his defense of *verso sciolto*, Bernardo has completely reconfigured the metrical possibilities. For instance, nowhere in previous writers was *ottava rima* mentioned, let alone suggested as a possible form for heroic poetry. He has also eliminated from the discussion other possibilities such as his own "distance rhymes" and *terza rima*. On the other hand, Bernardo's apparent dissatisfaction brings out a new and unexplored social dynamic, where poetic practice has now become a site of contention among an even larger group of interlocutors.

Unlike the previous authors, Bernardo finds himself in the midst of composing his work, rather than merely hypothesizing future directions for the development of the vernacular.<sup>6</sup> His letters thus signal a shift in direction, beginning in the early 1540s, from abstract speculation to concrete matters of composition. Within this changing environment, Bernardo's well-constructed academic logic does not guarantee acceptance within a given group, whose preferences may lie elsewhere. The creation of real poetry within specific social environments, such as the court of Ferrante Sanseverino, produces new issues and raises new questions, namely those related to matters of taste and aesthetic sensibility. Why should Sanseverino and D'Avila prefer *ottava rima* rather than other forms, such as

<sup>4</sup> Bernardo likely met Speroni, as well as others such as Bembo, while studying at the university in Padua in the 1520's. See Williamson, *Bernardo Tasso*, pg. 5.

<sup>5</sup> *Delle lettere di B. Tasso*, I, pp. 168-169. For a description of this letter relative to Bernardo's biography, see Williamson, pp. 100-101.

<sup>6</sup> Clearly Trissino is a writer who both theorized and put into practice ideas about vernacular epic. Unfortunately he does not offer the same degree of reflection while *in medias res*. Moreover, due to his financial and subsequent social independence, Trissino does not offer the same sort of lens for making sense of the developing discourse involving the production of vernacular epic within a certain kind of social world.

*verso sciolto* or *terza rima*? How has the search for an appropriate epic form changed with the new influence of individuals previously detached from speculative discussion? Even if Bernardo writes his work in *ottava rima*, will other poets continue to champion more recondite poetic forms?

Bernardo will continue to navigate these competing pressures, mainly during the 1550s when he will dedicate the majority of his time to his work. Before turning to his later problems, however, let us begin to trace these new questions by turning to Bernardo's second interlocutor, Sperone Speroni (1500-1588), whose own theoretical and poetic activity can help us make sense of changing attitudes in the 1540s. Speroni himself wrote little on the matter of epic poetry, and his poetic production is also rather small. Nevertheless, two aspects of Speroni's position as an independent intellectual offer a useful lens for looking at the developing discussion of new modes of vernacular expression, specifically within the aesthetic register of *gravitas*. First, in contrast to many of the authors previously studied, Speroni seeks to expand the vernacular into all possible spheres of cultural production as are found in Antiquity, from literature to oratory to philosophy. As such, he takes issue with previous conceptions of simply imitating the classics, and seeks instead a more stable theoretical foundation for developing new forms.

Second, while exploring new possibilities of vernacular expression, Speroni himself composed a tragedy, the *Canace*, in 1542. The peculiar style and meter of this work led to an anonymous treatise criticizing Speroni and his work. This document, through its critique of Speroni's tragedy, also takes explicit aim at a larger group of intellectuals, the Accademia degli Infiammati in Padua, and their own particular tastes in literary production. Although this screed against the Infiammati involves discussing proper rhyme schemes, it is clearly no longer a mere question of speculating about metrical form, but of diverging literary tastes.

While the debates in the 1530s addressed largely theoretical matters of meter and rhyme, intellectuals and writers have shifted the stakes considerably to more practical concerns. As we shall see, crucial to the debate over Speroni's *Canace* is the identification of a proper vernacular form of *gravitas*. Despite this shift from epic to tragedy, this debate will further illuminate problems facing poets in the mid sixteenth century, specifically those of stylistic suitability, metrical appropriateness, and the search for ever widening spheres of aesthetic experience in the vernacular.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Although we will not address the matter here, this debate over the *Canace* necessarily complicates the view that there exists a system—or competing systems—of genres in the sixteenth century. The notion of “genre”



## 3.1.1 Sperone Speroni's Vernacular Project

Speroni was born in 1500 in Padua.<sup>8</sup> In both his native city and in Bologna, he studied under various important thinkers, including the Aristotelian philosopher Pietro Pomponazzi, who would later appear as an interlocutor in Speroni's well-known dialogue promoting the use of the vernacular, *Dialogo delle lingue* (1542). After serving as the chair of logic and philosophy at the Studio in Padua in the 1520s, Speroni gradually became an independent but central figure in the intellectual and artistic world of the city, participating in several important academies, such as the Accademia degli Infiammati. This academy was founded in the late 1530s with the express purpose of focusing on questions of poetics and rhetoric. In 1542, a year before Bernardo sent his letter complaining about using *ottava rima*, Speroni had already published several important dialogues championing the vernacular, composed one of the earliest imitations of Greek tragedy in the vernacular, the *Canace*, and presided over the Infiammati—where he had imposed a rule of only using the vernacular, rather than Latin.<sup>9</sup>

Although Speroni rarely takes up the problem of vernacular epic, his various dialogues and treatises offer important points of discussion for the evolving discussion of adapting classical forms into the vernacular. Two main issues emerge in his writing: first, the expansion of the vernacular to include all forms of writing found in antiquity, from different types of poetry to history to oratory. Second, Speroni is largely unsatisfied with the limited view of imitation put forward by earlier humanists such as Pietro Bembo and Trifone Gabriele, who argue for the strict imitation of single models such as Petrarch and Boccaccio. Not only does Speroni advocate for expansion beyond conventional vernacular authors, but he also frequently criticizes his contemporaries who imitate a given piece of writing without truly understanding the reasons for its beauty and its effectiveness. These issues appear in Speroni's early works, specifically a collection of dialogues printed in 1542.<sup>10</sup> Of these dialogues, the *Dialogo della retorica* offers the clearest exam-

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as an autonomous and stable form appears alien to such discussions, where tragedy and epic are considered together in terms of similar modes of expression. i.e. *gravitas*.

<sup>8</sup> For an overview of Speroni's life and works, see the introduction by Mario Pozzi in Mario Pozzi, ed. *Trattatisti del Cinquecento*. Milan-Naples: Riccardo Ricciardi Editore, 1978, pp. 471-509.

<sup>9</sup> It is also important to note that the Infiammati were the first group of intellectuals to discuss Aristotle's *Poetics*, leading to the first printed commentaries being written by its members, Francesco Robortello, Bartolomeo Lombardi, and Vincenzo Maggi, in 1548-1550.

<sup>10</sup> For a brief introduction to these dialogues, see V. Vianello, "Sperone Speroni, Dialoghi." In: *L'incipit e la tradizione letteraria. Dal Trecento al Cinquecento*. Eds. P. Guaragnella, S. De Toma. Lecce: Pensa Multimedia, 2011, pp. 285-290.

ple of Speroni's highly intellectual, anti-Bembian position concerning the development of vernacular thought and letters.<sup>11</sup>

The setting of this *Dialogo* is Bologna in 1529. As with the other dialogues in this collection, Speroni is largely concerned with issues facing the development of the vernacular, such as the use of the language in philosophy and oratory. The interlocutors are three Venetian gentlemen: Marcantonio Soranzo, Giovan Francesco Valerio, and Antonio Brocardo, the same poet whom Bernardo Tasso praised as a great innovator of poetic form.<sup>12</sup> In Speroni's dialogue, Brocardo becomes the main speaker, expounding on the proper development of specifically vernacular forms of rhetoric and oratory. The ostensible goal of this dialogue, as outlined by the character Soranzo, is to leave aside abstract philosophical speculation ("a' filosofi lo specular rimettendo"), in favor of a discussion on the practical matters of civic life ("della vita civile").<sup>13</sup> According to Soranzo, part of one's civic existence requires speaking well, and the remainder of the dialogue derives from the question of cultivating an art of eloquence in the vernacular.

The principal issue, as Soranzo frames it, is whether the Latin art of oratory—that is, as it is articulated by Latin rhetoricians—is applicable to other languages ("sono in dubbio, se l'arte oratoria della lingua Latina si convegna con l'altre lingue, specialmente con la Toscana").<sup>14</sup> He frames the issue in terms of imitation, claiming that if he merely follows the example of Boccaccio, he will simply produce another *novella* directed towards cheering up some melancholic reader.<sup>15</sup> There is thus an immediate, not entirely implicit refutation of a certain conception of imitation, which looks only to Boccaccio as a model for prose writing.

After a short discussion on the importance of writing pleasantly, Brocardo claims that he finds the premises of their conversation unsatisfactory. In order to start again on a more firm theoretical ground, he states that he must, in fact, use terms taken from Latin ("parlando latinamente"). He thus recommences the discussion by explaining the principal components of classical rhetoric: invention, disposition, elocution, action, and memory.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> The text of the dialogue can be found in Speroni, *Opere*, I, 1740, pp. 202-242.

<sup>12</sup> In reality, Brocardo also studied under Pietro Pomponazzi in Bologna, likely with Speroni himself. See Claudio Mutini, "Brocardo, Antonio," in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, 14, 1971.

<sup>13</sup> *Opere*, I, pg. 203.

<sup>14</sup> *Opere*, I, pg. 203-204.

<sup>15</sup> "[Nella lingua Toscana] io ho opinione che a dilettere alcun maninconico, imitando il Boccaccio, qualche novella si possa scrivere senza più; cosa veramente diversa dalle tre guise di cause, le quali da' Latini scrittori sola e generale materia della loro arte rettorica si nominarono." *Opere*, I, pg. 204.

<sup>16</sup> *Opere*, I, pg. 212.

After defining these concepts, he once more apologizes for relying on Greco-Latin terminology, explaining that the vernacular lacks its own proper vocabulary for such matters:

Forse io v'annojo, mentre con le parole volgari le Latine e le Greche vo mescolando; e contra quello che io vi diceva pur dianzi, non discernendo tra le parole, come io le trovo, così le ammasso e confondo. Ma che posso io? certo questa è colpa de' nostri padri Thoscani; li quali non curando le cose gravi che alle dottrine partengono, solamente delle amorose con novellette, e con rime si diletтарono di parlare. Ben v'ha di quelli, che forno arditi in tentar le scienze: ma pochi sono e senza fama.<sup>17</sup>

There immediately seems to be the familiar dichotomy between "serious matters" ("cose gravi") and the pleasantness of conventional vernacular literature focused on amorous themes ("cose [...] amorose"). However, Brocardo is not condemning amorous themes as such. In fact, the target of his criticism is not even the lack of certain subject matter, but rather the inability of the vernacular to function as a scientific language. At stake is not "cose grave" or "dottrina" but a metalanguage capable of articulating the rules by which cultural activities such as rhetoric can be described. In other words, the vernacular lacks its own "arte"—that is, principles, precepts, and general categories—that serve to distinguish the features of eloquence without resorting to ambiguous discussions such as "pleasure," as Brocardo's first attempt at describing vernacular oratory demonstrated. Brocardo's frustration with an "absence" of a scientific language continues to function as a critique of the Bembian position that the only vernacular models to imitate in prose and poetry are Boccaccio ("novellette") and Petrarch ("rime"). Neither of these fundamental authors attempted to articulate an "arte oratoria," therefore forcing the followers of Bembo to rely on appropriating language from elsewhere. This statement should not be taken as condemnation of the "delight" inherent in vernacular literature, but rather of a certain, highly limited way of conceptualizing vernacular imitation.

In order to address this dearth of vocabulary, Brocardo claims that it is often necessary to look to classical languages and search for suitable words for expressing one's ideas, as long as they are understood by one's interlocutors: "E' adunque men male il ricorrere a' forestieri, le cui voci intendiamo, che a' nostrani che non s'intendano, imitando i Latini, li quali da' padri Greci le dottrine e le parole prendendo."<sup>18</sup> According to Brocardo, if one relies on borrowing completely unintelligible words, the process of properly communicating one's ideas ("concetti") fails as well.

<sup>17</sup> *Opere*, I, pg. 213.

<sup>18</sup> *Opere*, I, pp. 213-14.

Taking a cue from humanists (such as Bembo himself), Brocardo is also able to further legitimize this process of lexical expansion by pointing to the similar process by which Latin authors appropriated language and ideas from Greek. In confirmation of this view, the other character Valerio responds by praising Brocardo's adapting of Latin terms. He comments that Brocardo's shift to Latin terms was necessary given the need to express himself: "procedendo più oltra voi incapparete in concetti, che ragionandone, a volere essere inteso, vi sia mestieri di proveder di vocaboli, che agli orecchi d'Italia si confacciano un poco meglio, che i Latini non fanno."<sup>19</sup> Two separate characters thus repeat two important points in this dialogue: first, the absolute priority of the expression of ideas; second, the justifiable recourse to foreign terms in order to achieve such expression.

Despite its brevity, this exchange between Brocardo and his interlocutors suggests a sophisticated conception of the project of expanding the vernacular. Indeed, Brocardo's criticism of a Bembian mode of imitation is not directed toward the creation of new literary genres, but rather to a much wider project. More than lament the abundance of "amorous poetry," he is criticizing, among other things, the lack of a metalanguage required to describe the new directions that the vernacular should take, such as oratory. Speroni views the future development of the vernacular as primarily a matter of expressing one's ideas, many of which exist beyond the "novellette e rime" that a vernacular writer should imitate.

### 3.1.2 *The New Alchemists*

Though Speroni wants to widen the circle of vernacular concerns through his critique, he also analyzes the use and quality of literary language elsewhere in the *Dialogo della retorica*. Within a discussion concerning adorning one's oratory, Brocardo begins to describe his own experience as a young poet, offering a snapshot of a strictly Petrarchan writer in the early sixteenth century who follows an extremely limited imitative model.<sup>20</sup> He claims that he began his career under the tutelage of Trifone Gabriele, the same intellectual guiding Bernardino Daniello in his *Poetica*. Following Gabriele's advice, he exhaustively studied the rules ("regole") of the language of Petrarch and Boccaccio. In the end,

<sup>19</sup> *Opere*, I, pg. 214.

<sup>20</sup> Notably, Brocardo also emphasizes first that, as a younger writer, his primary interest was in achieving fame by speaking and writing the "ideas of his mind" ("i concetti del mio intelletto") in the vernacular: "Io veramente sin da' primi anni desiderando oltra modo di parlare e di scrivere volgarmente i concetti del mio intelletto, e questo non tanto per dovere essere inteso, il che è cosa da ogni volgare, quanto a fine che 'l nome mio con qualche laude tra i famosi si numerasse." *Opere*, I, pg. 223.

he produced his own grammar (“una mia gramatica”), outlining important elements of language such as declinations, conjugations, articles, pronouns, participles, and so forth, until finally becoming himself a “solemn grammarian” (“un solenne gramatico”).<sup>21</sup> The exhaustive nature of this list, together with the repeated reference to “grammar,” both suggest that Brocardo finds Gabriele’s approach erroneous at the level of method. It is no longer merely a matter of which authors to imitate, but also the type of thing taken into consideration. Brocardo seems to suggest that merely imitating the “grammar” of an author is not particularly fruitful.

Indeed, Brocardo mentions that he eventually found himself unsatisfied with his work. For instance, due to the occasional poverty of language (“alcune volte mi mancava i vocaboli”), he was forced to produce two dictionaries, one for rhymes (“un rimario”) and another for poetic themes (“i modi loro del descriver le cose”), in order to remain within the limits of a strict imitative model.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, this schematic approach to imitation leaves Brocardo with a sense of dissatisfaction. Indeed, he refers to this period of his life as a kind of imprisonment: “vedete voi oggimai a qual bassezza discesi, ed in che stretta prigione e con che lacci m’incatenai.”<sup>23</sup> Brocardo claims that he came to a realization concerning this erroneous manner of imitation once he examined the Latin works of Petrarch and Boccaccio, finding that these two authors did not write as well in Latin as they did in the vernacular (“veggendo le loro cose Latine per rispetto alle Tosche non esser degne de’ nomi loro”). He determines that these two authors did not understand the “art” of Latin as well as that of the vernacular, ultimately concluding that different languages have different poetic arts (“giudicai [...] a varie lingue varie gramatice, seguentemente varie arti poetice, e varie arti oratorie corrispondessero”).<sup>24</sup> Brocardo’s realization leads to a break with Gabriele. In particular, he rejects Gabriele’s advice to write vernacular poetry while remaining within Latin structures (“l’artificio Latino”). Instead, he chooses to uncover “another road” (“altra strada”) for understanding the art of vernacular poetry.<sup>25</sup>

Brocardo’s principal concern is rectifying the misapplication of the rules of one language in another. In his view, grammars and rhyming dictionaries are useful for learning Latin, yet they fail to help a young poet understand the “arte” of vernacular poetry. Bro-

<sup>21</sup> *Opere*, I, pg. 223.

<sup>22</sup> Such themes include “giorno, notte, ira, pace, odio, amore, paura, speranza, bellezza.” *Opere*, I, pg. 224.

<sup>23</sup> *Opere*, I, pg. 224.

<sup>24</sup> *Opere*, pg. 224.

<sup>25</sup> “Per la qual cosa lasciati stare i consigli del nostro padre Messer Trifone, il quale a poetar volgarmente con l’artificio Latino mi richiamava, [...] tener volli altra strada.” *Opere*, I, pg. 224.

cardo states that his conception of two different systems was confirmed when he saw his contemporaries attempting to replicate classical authors using the language of Petrarch:

Confermava mia opinione il vedere ogni giorno alcuni uomini, pur Toscani letterati e di grandissima fama, li quali tolti dal Petrarca, ed or Tibullo, ora Ovidio, or Virgilio imitando, facevan versi volgari; li quali mezzo tra volgari e Latini, parimente a' volgari ed a' Latini spiacevano.<sup>26</sup>

In other words, Brocardo claims that using strictly Petrarchan lyrical forms to imitate classical poets results in an unpleasant hybrid. Instead, it seems that a poet should commit to writing in either of the two traditions rather than mix them together.

The issue appears to be that of rhyme, since Brocardo finds that poets who hid or removed rhyme in their classical imitations were perhaps less erroneous in their experiments:

chiunque con nuova guisa di rime, o senza rima niuna i Latini imitava, meno errava al mio parere, e con giudicio più ragionevole le poesie confondeva, perocchioé togliendo a' versi la rima o del suo loco movendola, si leva loro gran parte di quella forma volgare, che i Latini e loro arte naturalmente abborrisce.<sup>27</sup>

Brocardo thus criticizes his contemporaries who do not understand that rhyme has produced a new poetic structure in the vernacular, one which requires a different understanding of the underlying craft. By removing and displacing rhyme, Brocardo finds that—even though they are moving far from Petrarch—such poets do not risk confusing vernacular and Latin poetry.

Brocardo further claims that he too participated in such metrical experimentation, specifically in search of epic poetry:

La qual cosa sì provai io in quel tempo, quando, quasi nuovo alchimista, lungamente mi faticai per trovare l'eroico; il quale nome niuna guisa di rima dal Petrarca tessuta non è degna d'appropriarsi.<sup>28</sup>

Although he does not offer any specific solution to the epic question, Brocardo clearly prefers metrical schemes like *verso sciolto* or “distance rhyming.”

This brief scene in the *Dialogo della retorica* scene perhaps confirms Bernardo Tasso's letter claiming that Speroni ultimately prefers *verso sciolto* to other forms. Regardless, it is

<sup>26</sup> *Opere*, I, pg. 225.

<sup>27</sup> *Opere*, I, p. 225.

<sup>28</sup> *Opere*, I, p. 225. Years later, the Venetian publisher Lodovico Dolce will repeat these terms, though in a much more negative light, “Non senza cagione l'Aretino soleva biasimar la prosontuosa vanità del Brocardo; il quale a guisa di inutile Alchimista, s'affaticava di trovare in lei [i.e. in questa lingua] il verso Heroico.” See *I quattro libri delle osservazioni di M. Lodovico Dolce*. Venice: Gabriel Giolito de' Ferrari, 1562, pg. 187. It is clear that Brocardo, who fashioned himself as a kind of anti-Bembista, was viewed poorly by some, in particular after his polemic with Pietro Aretino.

also clear that the vernacular still lacks a properly heroic meter, especially due to the fact that no clear example exists in Petrarch's work.

### 3.1.3 *Reframing the Question of Imitation*

Despite his efforts in metrical experimentation, Brocardo claims that he remained disillusioned with both available poetic forms and the more general approach to imitation coming from Bembo. At issue appears to be the continued lack of awareness of a properly vernacular art of poetry. Brocardo states that he returned to the study of Petrarch, where he established a new set of precepts for composition. Rather than focus on abstract grammatical categories, he focused on the effectiveness of Petrarch's "modes" of writing ("ponendo mente a' suoi modi"). His greatest interest lies in Petrarch's vocabulary, which is universally celebrated and illustrious despite including the use of both archaic and erudite words.<sup>29</sup> Although Brocardo claims that he does not have time to list all of the remaining virtues of Petrarch's style, he does name several crucial features. He highlights the figurative language that Petrarch uses to describe Laura, which always avoids directly describing her physical body.<sup>30</sup> He also praises the variety of Petrarch's language, where a term is never repeated in a poem.<sup>31</sup> Lastly, he points to Petrarch's harmonious juxtaposition of contrary words, the primary element which ultimately produces the wondrous effect of his poetry.<sup>32</sup> As a result, in contrast to the grammars, rhyming dictionaries, and thematic lists, Brocardo offers an alternative set of categories for understanding, judging, and imitating Petrarch's works. Though he clearly has in mind a larger list of components, the primary ones seem to be: a mixture of various types of diction (from common to archaic to erudite), metaphorical language, and rhetorical *copia*.<sup>33</sup>

Through Brocardo, Speroni thus offers a conception of the vernacular, and of its relationship to classical languages, that is much more expansive than those seen so far. He

29 Brocardo begins by describing the first step of his method as "le sue parole d'una in una annoverando e pesando." He goes on to describe common words ("quelle in modo al comue uso convenienti"), then archaic words ("rilucevano alcune poche, parte antiche, ma di vecchiezza non dispiacevole: uopo, unquanco, sovente"), and finally, erudite ones ("parte vaghe e leggiadre molto [...] solamente da' gentili ed alti ingegni sono adoprate' [...] le quali niuna lingua erudita non parlerebbe, nè scriverebbe la mano, se gli orecchi nol consentissero.") See *Opere*, I, pg. 226.

30 "[I] proprii nomi tacendo, mirabilmente ogni cosa dell'altrui voci suole adornare." *Opere*, I, pg. 226.

31 "[A]vendo detto una volta [un vocabolo] [...], mai li medesimi in quel sonetto non ridiceva." *Opere*, I, pg. 226.

32 "[D]ella discordia de' quali, l'uno all'altro con misura corrispondendosi, usciva fuori il contento che sente ognuno, e pochi sanno la sua cagione." *Opere*, I, pg. 226.

33 As we shall shortly see, it is likely that these are the same qualities valued by poets in Padua beginning in the 1530s. Giraldis will ultimately accuse Speroni, Tomitano, and others of subscribing to a particular view of poetry that emphasizes artificiality, or what he calls "patavinità." This issue is taken up later in this chapter.

wants to expand the vernacular to become not just a literary language, but also a “scientific” one; that is, a language capable of articulating technical principles and precepts in all areas of culture and learning. According to Speroni, authors such as Boccaccio cannot provide either examples of good oratory or of methods for articulating the art of oratory itself. Speroni’s position thus sets itself against the imitative project of Bembo and Trifone Gabriele.

While he argues for the establishment of a properly vernacular art of oratory, Speroni also criticizes contemporary poets for relying excessively on a classical framework for writing vernacular poetry. According to Speroni, the same imitative project mentioned in the discussion of oratory has, in fact, produced a vernacular “art of poetry.” Speroni’s problem, however, is that this “art” has been imported directly from classical languages. While it is clear that classical languages offer a panoply of different forms of poetry to recreate—from lyric to epic—, Speroni finds that many poets are incapable of distinguishing the specific qualities of their own language. He thus argues for a revaluation of the specificity of vernacular poetry, proposing a list of alternative aesthetic criteria for imitation, focusing on diction, metaphors, and variety.

Speroni returns again to the question of properly articulating one’s concepts, which involves looking beyond poetic genres to other realms of literature and thought, such as philosophy, oratory and the technical language.<sup>34</sup> His view of vernacular culture moves beyond the simple imitation of literary models to a broader conception of vernacular thought and letters. Moreover, although Antiquity provides examples of a wide variety of different kinds of human activity, it is up to modern writers to discover specifically modern rules and principles.

But what does this mean for the developing discussion of epic poetry? Speroni clearly allows for a certain degree of experimentation, as evinced by his claim that the “new alchemists” were perhaps more correct in their avoidance of rhyme in attempting to write vernacular epic. He is also against the conventional vernacular poetry outlined by Be-

34 Most scholarship on Speroni describes his project to develop a philosophical vocabulary in the vernacular, though little has been said about his concern with literary genres. For instance, Pozzi in his introduction to Speroni in *Trattatisti del Cinquecento* characterizes the second half of the ‘500: “Nella seconda metà del Cinquecento, per il dilagare dell’aristotelismo critico, si ebbe anche un’esasperata attenzione al contenuto,” leading to “la separazione netta fra forma e materia con svalutazione della forma.” Francesco Bruni, in an important article on Speroni, likewise emphasizes the “entusiasmo per la *ratio* e le *res* [...] accompagnato, in misura direttamente proporzionale, dal disprezzo per il *verbum*.” See Francesco Bruni (1968). «Sperone Speroni e l’Accademia degli Infiammati.» In: *Filologia e letteratura* XIII, pp. 24–71, pg. 28. Though it is certainly true that Speroni disagrees with the humanist approach to languages, I find unconvincing the idea that Speroni somehow advocated for an absolute prioritizing of “thing” over “word.” In fact, what I hope is becoming clearer is Speroni’s interest in the relationship between these two aspects.



mbo's project; that is, the strict imitation of Petrarch, who never produced a form capable of accommodating epic verse. Although Speroni has yet to mention Dante, it will become clear that the author of the *Commedia* will offer an alternative to the limited amorous subject matter of Petrarch.

Despite a lack of discussion of epic, Speroni offers also insight into the imitation of a classical genre with a similar set of aesthetic concerns, namely tragedy. In fact, Speroni's tragedy, *Canace*, composed around 1542, set off a rather intense debate in the 1540s between its author and another well-known theorist of vernacular poetry, Giambattista Giraldi Cinzio. By looking at their discussions—which extend into the 1550s—we gain further insight into the ways in which the early conversations about epic style, which are ultimately debates about proper verse form, expand into a larger concern about elevated style in general.

The central problem will continue to be that of the proper expression of subject matter, specifically that which is “serious” (“grave”). Tragedy, with its plot built upon an elevated subject matter, is meant to evoke a sense of *gravitas* much like in epic poetry. Recall that as early as the 1510s, Trissino had already produced his tragedy, *Sofonisba*, in *verso sciolto*. Speroni will refuse this form in favor of a new, experimental metrical scheme.<sup>35</sup> Giraldi, then a successful poet and philosopher in Ferrara, will find that Speroni—in his zeal to find new means of expression—has produced an inept and ugly language unfit for public performance; Speroni, in his response, will rely on a robust conception of linguistic innovation to justify his own practice. Their discussion overlaps frequently with problems of heroic meter. Indeed, their opposing views on the production of properly “serious” literature will continue to map out two currents in sixteenth century thought about the expansion of the vernacular: on the one hand, Giraldi's deference to the “popular” preferences of his patrons; on the other, Speroni's more abstract and artificial solutions.

### 3.2 THE *canace* DEBATE: GIRALDI

Speroni composed the *Canace* in 1542, while leading the Accademia degli Infiammati, before whom he read his earliest drafts.<sup>36</sup> The plot follows Canace, daughter of Aeolus,

<sup>35</sup> As will become apparent, Speroni's metrical scheme echoes the lyrical experiments of Tolomei, Brocardo, and Bernardo Tasso. A more sustained analysis is required in order to explore more fully these continuities in literary practice (and across “genres” for that matter).

<sup>36</sup> For a reconstruction of the history of the composition, diffusion, and immediate reaction to the *Canace*, see the introduction to Sperone Speroni and Giambattista Giraldi Cinzio (1982). *Canace, e scritti in sua difesa*:

and her love for Macareo, who turns out to be, unsurprisingly, her long lost brother. Unfortunately, they produce a child, the incestuous nature of the relationship is uncovered, Aeolus has the child killed, and Canace commits suicide. The work appears to have been read widely before its first printing in 1546.<sup>37</sup> Several well-known intellectuals praised the work, including Pietro Aretino and Claudio Tolomei.<sup>38</sup>

By the mid 1540s, an anonymous, and highly critical, manuscript began to circulate under the innocuous title of *Giudizio d'una Tragedia di Canace e Macareo*.<sup>39</sup> The identity of the author remained unclear until relatively recently, though historically he was believed to be the Florentine intellectual Bartolomeo Cavalcanti. Recent work has shown conclusively that the author was, in fact, Giambattista Giraldi Cinzio (1504-1573). The *Giudizio* was printed, without authorial attribution, in 1550, an event which spurred Speroni to respond. He drafted an "Apologia" dedicated to the Duke of Ferrara sometime between 1552 and 1553, although it was never finished. In 1558, he also held several lectures before the Accademia degli Elevati of Padua in which he elaborated on the ideas from his defense. Taken together, Giraldi's *Giudizio* and Speroni's *Apologia* and lectures all offer valuable insight into problems of style and creation of proper *gravitas* in the Cinquecento. At stake is the issue of linguistic innovation and the acceptable means by which a poet may expand beyond conventional vernacular models in search of new methods for producing a given aesthetic range such as "elevation" and "magnificence." Let us begin with Giraldi, who believes that a poet ought to remain within a well-defined and more conventional range of formal options.

### 3.2.1 *Giraldi vs. Speroni*

Born in 1504 in Ferrara, the city in which he would spend the majority of his life, Giraldi was a poet, dramatist, and an intellectual who was well known across Europe. He initially taught philosophy, then rhetoric, at the Studio in Ferrara, where, among other things, he engaged in a famous theoretical discussion in the 1530s with Celio Calcagnini on the

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*Giudizio ed epistola latina*. Ed. by Christina Roaf. Bologna: Commissione per i testi di lingua, in particular pp. xiii – xxiii.

37 Speroni intended to perform the tragedy before the academy itself, with the help of the Venetian playwright Ruzzante; however, Ruzante's death cut short his plans and it was ultimately never performed. There was one performance in Rome in 1561, which did not involve Speroni.

38 See Roaf, *Canace*.

39 Roaf acknowledges that the *Giudizio* could have been composed in 1543, although she finds it more plausible to situate it in 1547-48.

problem of imitation in Latin.<sup>40</sup> In the late 1530s, Giraldi's interests shifted from Latin to the vernacular. In 1541 he completed—and had performed—the *Orbecche*, one of the first vernacular tragedies written in a “regular” classical manner.<sup>41</sup> It is in these same years that he came across Speroni's *Canace*, to which he responded with his *Giudizio*.

Giraldi's critique of the *Canace* adopts the conventional format of the dialogue, though it is divided into two separate fictional conversations between several anonymous interlocutors. The first, taking place among philosophy students in Bologna engages largely with problems of narrative and character. The second occurs between an unnamed Florentine intellectual (“il Fiorentino”) and a group of students, all riding in a gondola after a visit to Trissino's house in Murano. Regarding the plot, Giraldi follows a largely Aristotelian framework, relying on concepts of imitation and narrative unity. As a result, this work is one of the earliest attempts to integrate the *Poetics* into practical literary criticism. Despite such reliance on Aristotle for structural issues, as soon as Giraldi takes up the problem of language in the second half of the dialogue, his critical strategies shift substantially. Instead of relying on abstract categories, he takes issue with Speroni's specific way of writing vernacular poetry, which he finds to be overly artificial and improper for expressing tragic *gravitas*. According to Giraldi, this improper style is celebrated in Speroni's Padua, specifically among the Accademia degli Infiammati, who are promoting an overwrought and lyrical language despite the aesthetic requirements of genres like tragedy. To understand more clearly Giraldi's position, let us turn to the second half of his *Giudizio*.

As already stated, the primary speaker is an anonymous Florentine explaining to a group of students his issues with the language of the *Canace*.<sup>42</sup> For the Florentine, there are two primary issues with this work, one metrical and the other stylistic. He begins by claiming that Speroni's tragedy departs from the traditional use of *verso sciolto* which had been inaugurated by Trissino and followed to great success by Rucellai and others. Instead, Speroni has chosen to use both an irregular rhyme scheme (“rime libere”) and an inconsistent verse form, comprised of hendecasyllables, *settenari* and *quinari*. As a result,

<sup>40</sup> See DellaNeva, JoAnn. *Ciceronian Controversies*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007, in particular section III.

<sup>41</sup> For an overview of Giraldi's views on tragedy, see Rosanna Morace. “La teoria del tragico nel Giraldi (con incursioni nell'epico).” In: *Il mito, il sacro e la storia nella tragedia e nella riflessione teorica sul tragico. Atti del Convegno di studi (Salerno, 15-16 novembre 2012)*. Naples: Liguori, 2013, pp. 169-185.

<sup>42</sup> Roaf convincingly argues that this speaker is most likely Bartolomeo Cavalcanti. Her evidence relies on statements made by the Florentine, such as references to his time in Padua, his *Retorica*, and some of his opinions which line up with Cavalcanti's own work. Moreover, Cavalcanti was in Ferrara working with Giraldi in this period. See the introduction to her edition of the *Canace*.

not only has Speroni refused to follow the contemporary practice of blank verse but also more conventional rhyme schemes found in traditional vernacular poetry.

As an example, here is a speech from the opening pages of the *Canace*, where a servant addresses Queen Deiopea:

Regina: Deiopea  
 Vagliami quella fede  
 Con la quale io vi servo, & ho servita  
 La maggior parte homai de la mia vita,  
 Sì ch'io possa esser degna  
 Di saper la cagione  
 Ch'in così lieto giorno,  
 Giorno di vostro bene  
 Di publica allegrezza  
 A voi sola contrista il volto e 'l petto;  
 Forse al vostro dolore  
 Recarà alcun rimedio  
 Il mio leale amore,  
 Et quel potrà ne' vostri casi gravi  
 Ch'è uso di potere  
 Vostro senno e valore.<sup>43</sup>

As is clear, there is an uneven mixture of different line lengths with the occasional rhyme ("servita" - "vita"; "dolore" - "amore"). Although we will not comment further on this form, it is worth noting that the structure produces an odd rhythm and phonic texture if read with any sort of pause at the end of each line, especially when a rhyme word does appear.

The Florentine finds Speroni's metrical scheme to be most similar to the lyrical form of the *frottola*, which is better served for singing of base and vulgar themes:

[questi versi] per lo più sono stati insino ad ora della Frottola, vilissima materia e componimento di poca considerazione appresso a dotti e giudiziosi rimatori. Non sono da materia grave simili versi, e questo molto consideratamente notò il lume di questa etade non meno nella volgare che nell'altre due più belle lingue, Monsignore il Bembo, nelle sue Prose della lingua volgare: cioè che i versi interi portano in sè gravità e i rotti piacevolezza; la quale piacevolezza non conviene a descrivere una cosa tragica interamente.<sup>44</sup>

Giraldi appeals immediately to the well-known theoretical discussion found in Bembo's *Prose della volgar lingua* concerning the aesthetic categories of *gravitas* and pleasantness. Following Bembo, Giraldi writes that uneven ("rotti") verses produce a sensation of pleasantness due to the closer proximity of rhyme words, while longer lines are required in

<sup>43</sup> See *Canace tragedia di M. Sperone Speroni nobile padovano*. Florence: Francesco Doni, 1546, pg. 9v.

<sup>44</sup> Roaf, pp. 129-130.

order to evoke *gravitas*. Of interest here is not Giraldi's reliance on Bembo's aesthetic distinctions, which are, in any event, not followed in any kind of systematic way. Instead, Giraldi alludes to Bembo's approach as a way to theoretically legitimize his condemnation of Speroni's new form of dramatic verse. This condemnation relies on the traditional rhetorical notion of decorum, which we have seen everywhere in the earlier discussions of vernacular epic form. Essentially the question remains: does this meter, or this style, accurately convey the subject matter?

Giraldi's anonymous Florentine reconstructs this specific rhetorical argument by differentiating between the two levels of composition of a tragedy. First, the poet must be aware that tragedy is a "materia grave."<sup>45</sup> Once the poet understands this essential feature of his subject matter, he must then choose an appropriately "grave" metrical form. The Florentine argues that one should use the *endecasillabo sciolto* invented by Trissino and followed by all subsequent dramatists. He also claims that blank verse has been accepted by those who understand, by means of their ears, the appropriateness of unrhymed lines for drama: "quantunque nudi e senza il liscio delle rime, tanto in dicevol materia piacciono alle buone orecchie, quanto quelli che fanno inganno all'orecchie altrui colle armoniose rime."<sup>46</sup>

It is at this moment concerning the use of rhyme that the Florentine deviates from his discussion of Speroni to an extended criticism of early vernacular poets who had attempted to produce new forms of heroic meter. In fact, the Florentine accuses Speroni of relying on the same "distance" rhymes invented by Antonio Brocardo and perfected by Bernardo Tasso: "i quali [versi] non sono però stati trovati da lui [i.e. Speroni], ma furono già un capriccio del Brocardo mentre egli vaneggiava per trovare l'eroico volgare, e doppo furono accettati dal Tasso."<sup>47</sup>

Thus the experimentations linked to epic poetry in the 1520s and 1530s re-emerge as a possibility to poets in other genres, such as tragedy. The problem of *gravitas* has become not merely a problem facing poets seeking to produce epic poetry, but other forms as well. Giraldi's criticism of this meter as unsuitable for "cose gravi" is therefore also an implicit condemnation of the same form for epic poetry. In fact, he ultimately claims that such an irregular meter is most appropriate for lyrical "games," rather than serious

<sup>45</sup> Giraldi writes, "la Tragedia avanza di gravità ogni sorte di poema, come bene nota Aristotile e doppo lui Ovidio nel secondo libro de' Tristi." This is a possible reference to Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1462b, though he doesn't discuss *gravità*. The second reference comes from Ovid, *Tristia*, II, v. 381: "omne genus scripti gravitate tragoedia vincit." See Roaf, pg. 172, n. 167.

<sup>46</sup> Roaf, pg. 132.

<sup>47</sup> Roaf, pg. 133.

matters: “sarebbe forse convenuta questa maniera di numeri in giuochi amorosi.”<sup>48</sup> Giraldis thus reintroduces the same problem seen previously, that of lyrical poetry—which mainly deals with amorous themes—and more serious genres such as epic and tragedy. The central concern remains that of distancing one’s poetry from more lyrical modes of expression.

Following the same logic seen in authors from Daniello to Tolomei, Giraldis brings up the problem of rhyme. According to Giraldis, rhyme is merely poetic ornament, rather than a necessity, for vernacular literature. Despite his reliance on Bembo’s poetics, he does not follow a strictly Bembian conception of vernacular poetry, at least in terms of tragedy. Indeed, his principal argument for the avoidance of rhyme mainly concerns dramatic genres, where the use of rhyme would disrupt any sense of naturalness:

la rima è data ai nostri versi più per la dolcezza e per l’armonia che per la necessità del verso; la quale armonia, ne’ ragionamenti d’ogni dì, o sia tra grandi uomini e tra popolari, non ha luogo, perché porta con sé pensiero, e non pur pensiero di tempo necessario al ragionare prudente, ma pensiero di ritrovar le rime che si rispondano, il che è vizio in que’ parlari che vogliono parere nati naturalmente.<sup>49</sup>

Such language echoes Trissino’s earlier defense of *verso sciolto*, in which he also relies on the description of rhyme as something which demonstrates “forethought” (“pensamento”).<sup>50</sup> In fact, Giraldis refers to Trissino directly, who he claims introduced a more “natural” form of versification for drama in the vernacular: “E giudico che molto debbano i nostri secoli al Trissino, per averci egli dato questa maniera di versi, senza la quale non era mai possibile che le cose della scena avessero i loro numeri.”<sup>51</sup>

Yet, despite his reliance on Trissino and his belief that rhyme produces “sweetness and harmony,” Giraldis also finds that blank verse is improper for epic. Perhaps feigning ignorance of the fact that Trissino was on the verge of publishing his own epic in *verso sciolto*, Giraldis writes that those poets who had used unrhymed lines to compose in epic had failed to produce true epic “majesty.” Instead, future epic poets should write in *terza rima*:

E mi pare che coloro che si hanno eletto questi versi sciolti per gli eroici volgari, non abbian conosciuta la maestà della terza rima in materia eroica; e pure

<sup>48</sup> Roaf, pg. 133.

<sup>49</sup> Roaf, pg. 135.

<sup>50</sup> In Giraldis’s other printed works, he repeats this same point. For example, in his *Discorsi* (pg. 191): “i versi con le rime sono più lontani dal parlare di ogni dì di tutti gli altri, portando con lor maggior pensiero che gli altri non fanno”; and in his *Romanzi* (pg. 96): “la rima è tutto quel dolce e quel soave armonioso che possono avere i nostri versi.” Cited in Roaf, pg. 173, n. 180.

<sup>51</sup> Roaf, pg. 136.

hanno avuto innanzi a gli occhi l'esempio e di Dante e di Petrarca, i quali hanno mostrato, coi loro poemi in terza rima composti, come si deono trattare le cose eroiche da' volgari e qual maniera di versi vi si convenga.

Giraldi's view appears to align with Daniello's approach, which elevates Dante's *Commedia* and Petrarch's *Trionfi* as the best models for vernacular narrative poetry. In Giraldi's view, if Dante and Petrarca were alive and saw poets using *verso sciolto* for heroic themes, they would laugh ("si sariano riso della loro oppenione"). Giraldi's justification should now be quite familiar, as he claims that vernacular poets must make use of the vernacular meter that most corresponds to classical hexameter: "a' quali esametri rispondono i terzetti volgari, detti catena, e soli sono atti, come gli esametri nel Latino, a trattare materia grave che lungamente sia da essere scritta e trattata."<sup>52</sup>

Despite criticizing Speroni's tragedy, Giraldi also incorporates the main issues of the earlier debate on epic meter. More specifically, he repeats the same two fundamental issues: the combination of lengthy narration ("trattare ... lungamente") and serious subject matter ("materia grave"). Unlike the earlier discussion, however, Giraldi must now come to terms with a metrical form that had been previously absent, the *ottava rima* used in chivalric romance. Much like Bernardo's letter several years prior, Giraldi must account for an alternative metrical scheme already in use in a large number of popular, long-form narrative poems. His response is brief but enlightening: "quantunque costoro che scrivono i Romanzi si siano appresi all'ottava rima e s'abbiano scelta questa maniera di versi per convenevole all'eroico; i quali versi sono più tosto da essere giudicati rispondenti all'elego che all'eroico."<sup>53</sup> For Giraldi, the rhyme scheme produced in an *ottava* reproduces the sensation of reading a classical elegy, rather than heroic poetry. In other words, he once again reintroduces the dichotomy between lyrical poetry and more "serious" forms, implying the need to establish a clear emarcation between the two literary domains. As we shall see later, despite preferring *terza rima*, Giraldi will ultimately choose the *ottava* due to the pressures of his patrons in Ferrara. Let us return, however, to the specific criticisms that Giraldi levies against the *Canace*, which extends beyond meter to the question of a proper style that is "dicevole alla Tragedia."<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Roaf, pg. 137.

<sup>53</sup> Roaf, pg. 137. Roaf notes (p. 174, n. 193, n. 196), and we will return to it later, that Giraldi elsewhere condemns the use of *ottava rima* in heroic poetry, preferring *terza rima*. In his *Romanzi* (pp. 96, 99), he condemns the use of *versi sciolti* and praises *terza rima*. Yet later (pp. 99, 108), concedes to the use of *ottava rima* due to modern tastes, but only repeating his preference for *terza rima*. He also returns to the point that *stanze* are more appropriate for elegy.

<sup>54</sup> Roaf, pg. 139. Giraldi even offers a clear definition of style, which appears to be different than meter: "intendendo per lo stile la elocuzione e il modo dello scrivere" (pg. 139).

3.2.2 *Giraldi vs. Padua*

Giraldi sees Speroni's experimentation with poetic expression as inferior. Along with the poetry of Brocardo and Tasso, Giraldi charges that Speroni's poetry does not match form to subject matter. In addition to condemning Speroni's tragedy for failing to suitably match form to subject matter, Giraldi further associates Speroni's stylistic shortcomings with a tendency to rely too heavily on overly lyrical forms, rather than looking to pre-existing narrative and dramatic alternatives, such as *terza rima* and *verso sciolto*. For Giraldi, this predilection for lyrical artifice results from Speroni's general lack of a proper aesthetic sensibility. Indeed, he accuses Speroni of employing a style comprised of word games, odd sounds, and syntactic contortions, all of which are more proper for a poet of love poetry:

perché essendo il proprio dello stile di levare il soverchio e gli adombramenti e le inutili delle parole, questi [i.e. Speroni] è tanto intento a gli adombramenti, alle girandole e a gli strepitosi suoni delle voci, che mi pare più tosto leggere un lascivetto innamorato che uno autore tragico; anzi uno del quale si possa sicuramente dire che egli non sappia che cosa sia stile.<sup>55</sup>

Put differently, it seems that, in Giraldi's view, Speroni lacks a certain stylistic *sprezzatura*, opting instead for a stylistic affectation founded on the accumulation of immediately noticeable rhetorical devices. For Giraldi, Speroni writes in an overwrought lyrical style, which lacks "una prudenza soda, una grandezza magnifica, un parlar grave."<sup>56</sup> He thus continues to return to the familiar dichotomy between lyric lasciviousness and a more substantial *gravitas*.<sup>57</sup>

The elements of style that Giraldi finds most offensive in Speroni's tragedy concern the latter's diction and sound, both of which fail to achieve "decoro." Regarding the use of words, Giraldi writes that the *Canace* contains "useless embellishments" ("abbellimenti inutili") unsuitable for the subject matter. Indeed, they are, to an extent, unnatural: "lontani dalla qualità della materia e dalla natura delle cose di che si ragiona, e fuori di tempo e di luogo usate, tolgono la forza al ragionamento."<sup>58</sup> In terms of sound, Giraldi finds that merely listening to the *Canace* produces nothing but laughter, as the language continues to move away from the requisite *gravitas* of tragedy:

<sup>55</sup> Roaf, pg. 139.

<sup>56</sup> Roaf, pg. 139.

<sup>57</sup> Giraldi further describes Speroni's stylistic games as "modi di favellare inconsiderati, più tosto pieghevoli alla lascivia che alla gravità, all'umile che all'alto" (Roaf, pg. 139). Later, he says "Non si tiene questo stile a scaldar gli animi; non si sta su quest'ombre di parole, che sono detti fioretti da chi non conosce il frutto, che deono produrre i fiori delle voci che nascono dalla pianta d'un felice spirito" (Roaf, pg. 139).

<sup>58</sup> Roaf, pg. 140.



E spesse fiate mi sono da me riso di molti i quali, pensandosi che tutta la grandezza e la maestà della nostra lingua e la forza e l'efficacia del ragionare e di muovere gli animi stia su la copia delle parole di gran suono e su gli aggiamenti di sentenze e di voci gonfiate, fanno composizioni delle quali si può dire che suonano bene, ma non dicono né operano nulla; perché, ancora che queste cose aggiungano alle volte gravità, ornamento, forza e splendore alle composizioni, se vi sono sparse per entro di maniera [...] che siano come finissime perle sparse in un vario e preziosissimo ricamo, così, postevi in troppa abbondanza, le fanno inutili e spiacevoli a chi le legge.<sup>59</sup>

It is clear that Giralaldi's stylistic ideal avoids overt embellishment, rhetorical abundance, or phonic excess. Instead, his goal appears to be producing a kind of forcefulness ("forza") and effectiveness ("efficacia"), without an overly complex style, in order to move his listeners ("muover gli animi").

In reality, this list of defects, from poetic *copia* to peculiar diction, echoes the same list that Speroni himself praised in the *Dialogo della retorica*. It seems that Speroni, with the *Canace*, attempted to put in practice the same theoretical issues brought up by Brocardo in the *Dialogo della retorica*. Moreover, it appears that Speroni even incorporated the metrical schemes invented by Brocardo himself, with displaced rhymes and irregular verse lengths. In other words, if we take seriously Giralaldi's characterization of the style of the *Canace*, Speroni's metrical and stylistic experimentation is not an isolated case or a whimsical choice, but rather belongs to a recent and specific group of poets actively reflecting on, and experimenting with, different forms. Given the highly critical nature of the *Giudizio*, we should naturally hesitate to accept the entirety of Giralaldi's description of Speroni's poetry. Nevertheless, his point concerning Speroni's reliance on Brocardo and Bernardo Tasso aligns with the evident relationship between these figures as evinced by Speroni's *Dialogo* and Bernardo's letters. This point is worth emphasizing as it helps us understand more clearly not only the different moments in early sixteenth century experimentation, but also the continuities between these approaches.

More relevant to our analysis of developing methods for expanding vernacular poetry is Giralaldi's shift from a theoretical critique to more general issues of taste. While previously he relied on Bembo and other authorities to challenge Speroni's style, he now has his characters describe their own experience in listening to poetry. Such a movement towards aesthetic preference becomes even clearer once the Florentine leaves behind Speroni's *Canace* in order to criticize the current literary fashions of Padua, specifically within the Accademia degli Infiammati.

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59 Roaf, pg. 140.

According to the Florentine, Speroni's overwrought and artificial style is not peculiar to his writing, but rather comes from the *Infiammati* in general:

E questo mi pare oggi di particolar vizio d'alcuni di quei Padovani ... che nell'Accademia degli *Infiammati* si sono intromessi, e di coloro similmente che son dati a seguirli; i quali hanno pensato che l'altezza e la gravità dello stile tutta sia nelle gonfiate voci, ne gli intricati parlari, nell' accogliere disusati modi di dire.<sup>60</sup>

Once more, Giraldi implies that there already exists a means of achieving "altezza" and "gravità," but the *Infiammati* have chosen to employ an excess of improper rhetorical figures in their writing. The Florentine even claims that he himself has gone to their academy, where he witnessed the widespread dissemination of similar stylistic vices. In reality, he attributes this manner of writing to a malignant "patavinità."<sup>61</sup> In this view, Speroni's tragedy thus becomes the most recent example of a larger, and much more problematic, kind of writing originating in Padua.

The Florentine gives several examples of this inflated style by referring to one of the major works on poetics to emerge from the Accademia degli *Infiammati*, Bernardino Tomitano's *Ragionamento del parlar toscano*, composed in the early 1540s.<sup>62</sup> This text offers an extended discussion of the proper ways of composing in the vernacular, both in poetry and prose. The Florentine cites several lines directly from the treatise as examples of an indecorous lyrical artificiality.<sup>63</sup> For instance, the Florentine remarks that, according to Tomitano, a poet who misses his beloved should write lines such as, "Io ti raccolgo ad ogni ora più fresco nella mia memoria, e tengo dentro nascoso nel grembo de' miei desiri."<sup>64</sup> Unsurprisingly, the characters in Giraldi's dialogue all find such examples ridiculous, and they all begin to laugh.<sup>65</sup> In fact, one of them asks the Florentine to stop quoting Tomitano, claiming that the language is "hurting his ears" ("percosse nelle orecchie").<sup>66</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Roaf, pg. 141.

<sup>61</sup> "Ha molti mesi che, essendo anch'io intromesso in quella Accademia, e ragionandosi un giorno di varie cose e vari componimenti recitandosi, avvenne che fu ragionato d'uno non Padovano, ma tale imitatore de' vizi loro quanto allo scrivere, che non meno in lui che ne' Padovani natii si vedeva l'istessa Patavinità" (pg. 141). This last term suggests the criticism found in Quintilian made by Apollio against the writing of Livy, whom he accuses of writing with a certain "Patavinitas." It is unclear how these terms are related. It is also likely that there is some sort of regional conflict at play here between Padua and Ferrara, or, more likely, between Padua and Florence. Many thanks to Martin McLaughlin for pointing me in the direction of Quintilian's comments on Livy.

<sup>62</sup> The Florentine mentions "E nel ragionare fu addutto dal Principe dell'Accademia un libro di costui di superbo e magnifico titolo, cioè Dello Oratore e del Poeta perfetto, fatto ci attenesse quello che 'l titol ci promette" (Roaf, pg. 141). This text was first printed in 1545, though it had circulated in manuscript for several years prior.

<sup>63</sup> All examples provided are almost identical to the actual printed text from the 1545 edition.

<sup>64</sup> Roaf, pg. 141.

<sup>65</sup> "[N]on poterono tenere le risa gli ascoltanti." Roaf, pg. 142.

<sup>66</sup> Roaf, pg. 142.

The criticism of Tomitano's language largely follows the same reasoning and terminology as the earlier censure of Speroni's *Canace*. Indeed, one of the characters lambastes Tomitano's affected language, which is incapable of expressing either "elevation" ("altezza") or "gravitas" ("gravità"):

Che viluppi son questi? Che sconci modi di favellare? Puossi credere da alcuno che la gravità e l'altezza dello stile stia in questa tanta affettazione? In questi strepiti di voci tanto lontani da ogni natura?<sup>67</sup>

Again, the principal opposition appears to lie between the affectation of Speroni, Tomitano, and the Infiammati, and a more "natural" form of producing elevated language.

Through the *Giudizio*, Giraldi continually emphasizes the notion of stylistic impropriety, which is also essentially an index of generic impropriety. According to the *Giudizio*, if the form of a work of literature, such as a tragedy, fails to express its subject matter according to an acceptable aesthetic paradigm, it is a failure on the part of the poet to understand the requirements of that genre. In other words, although Giraldi relies, in the first half of the dialogue, on a text like Aristotle's *Poetics* to establish a taxonomy of genres, by the end it is largely a question of stylistic decorum that guarantees poetic success. For Giraldi, the elements found in the *Canace* that signal failure are all related to the improper application of metrical and stylistic choices that are more suitable for lyrical poetry—which allows a certain degree of affectation and artificiality—rather than the austerity of tragic poetry. These choices involve highly figurative language, odd syntax, strange—often archaic—diction, word play, all of which create a "harsh" sound for listeners.

By implication, according to Giraldi, writers employing such artistic choices in works that treat other serious subjects, such as epic poetry, would have equally disastrous results. As a result, although he only refers to epic in passing, it is clear that Giraldi—at least, in the *Giudizio*—wants future epic poets to make use of likewise "uncomplicated" language.

### 3.2.3 *Natural vs. Artificial Language*

But what does gravity consist of for Giraldi's anonymous Florentine? For stylistic models for "materie gravi," he refers to two examples from Petrarch, first the *canzone* "Nel dolce tempo della prima etade," and the *Trionfo della morte*. The choice of these examples is important, as it shows Giraldi attempting to remain within the confines of the prevailing model of imitation, that of Petrarch. At the same time, Giraldi also attempts to identify

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<sup>67</sup> Roaf, pg. 142.

examples within Petrarch's *oeuvre* that are predominantly narrative in character.<sup>68</sup> His approach echoes the one seen by Daniello's *Poetica* from a decade earlier.

Regarding Petrarch's *canzone*, the Florentine states that it is a clear example of "gravità," as it uses an "elevated and serious conceit" ("alto e grave concetto"), while also avoiding the "bloated" ("gonfiati") figures of speech seen in Speroni.<sup>69</sup> In addition to suggesting the avoidance of affected manners of writing, the Florentine also recommends imitating Petrarch's moderation in employing antithetical lyrical images, such as burning in ice, freezing in fire, and so forth, all of which were used "giudiziosamente" throughout in the *Canzoniere*.<sup>70</sup> Petrarch's *Triumph of Death*, on the other hand, mixes together not only "art" and "nature" ("l'arte colla natura"), but also "sweetness" with "gravitas" ("il dolce col grave").<sup>71</sup>

This concept of "nature" becomes central to the Florentine's praise of proper poetic judgment and style. As another positive model, he also lists Virgil, whose poetry was founded on a proper understanding of the "naturally" majestic qualities of the Latin language of his own epoch:

solo s'è appigliato a quelle [cose] che portano seco gravità, veggendo egli che l'eroico latino e il tempo in che egli scrivea, già pieno della grandezza e della maestà romana, amava più la gravità che 'l descrivere ogni minuta cosa legiadramente, come spesse volte ha fatto Ovidio nelle sue Mutazioni.<sup>72</sup>

Though he does not speak of diction, syntax, or other stylistic concerns, Giraldi makes a further distinction between two uses of language that echoes his earlier discussion of improperly lyrical language and the style appropriate for *gravitas*. On the one hand is Virgil, who understood the sensibility of his own epoch, creating a poetry that best captures contemporary "gravità." On the other hand is Ovid who, it is implied, somehow did not fully comprehend his particular moment and errs by employing an overly descriptive style of writing.<sup>73</sup>

As a result, Giraldi establishes in Roman literature two competing modes of appreciating and composing literature, modes which then seem to re-emerge in the contemporary

68 The use of this particular *canzone* is illuminating, as it is one of Petrarch's more unconventionally "narrative" poems from the *Canzoniere*. A more sustained analysis of this particular *canzone* in the Cinquecento is warranted, as I think that this specific poem becomes important for later writers as well.

69 Roaf, pg. 145.

70 Once again, Giraldi's criticism seems to line up with Speroni's earlier *Dialogo*, in which Brocardo emphatically praises Petrarch's juxtaposition of contrasting images as the essence of his poetry. It appears that Speroni's suggestion to emulate specifically Petrarchan paradox led to an abundance of these forms in his work and in that of the *Infiammati*.

71 Roaf, pg. 145.

72 Roaf, pg. 147.

73 Interestingly, this reference to "descrivere ogni minuta cosa" echoes statements made by writers as diverse as Trissino, Pigna, and Torquato Tasso, who are all interested in the specific rhetorical figure of *enargeia*.

world. First, there is Giraldis and the correct understanding of the contemporary state of poetry. Second, there is Padua and the Accademia degli Infiammati, who practice an untimely and unpleasant form of writing.

This conception of “timeliness” comes out most clearly in Giraldis’s specific discussion of properly tragic diction. He writes that a tragic lexicon should use words that most closely adhere to contemporary use: “s’accostano all’uso e con esso convengono, [le quali] sono piene di luce e di chiarezza, la quale principalmente deve considerare chi parla e non affettar le voci tralate, ornate e lontane dal comune favellare per fare enigmi, ma per essere inteso da chi l’ascolta.”<sup>74</sup>

He continues to insist that tragic, serious, and elevated language must avoid artificiality.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, for Giraldis, the greatest vice for a poet is to reveal one’s artifice in an unnatural way (“che l’arte si scorga e la natura sia sepolta”).<sup>76</sup> In opposition to such affectation and “bloated words,” Giraldis’s ideal poet should make use of “clarity” and “light.” Although we will explore more fully Giraldis’s ideal style in a later chapter, it is important to emphasize that these comments in the *Giudizio* continually demonstrate a coherent view of the “proper” uses of language. For Giraldis, the goal is the creation of a kind of stylistic *claritas* that is immediately intelligible and seemingly natural, even for more serious matters, whether tragic or epic.

Let us review the main points of Giraldis’s critique. First, in terms of meter, he believes that a tragic poet should employ *verso sciolto*.<sup>77</sup> This form offers a greater sense of *gravitas* due to its use of the hendecasyllable and the lack of rhyme. He relies on largely the same justification seen in the 1530s for the use of *verso sciolto* in epic narrative. Giraldis further believes that epic poetry should use *terza rima*, a position that will necessarily shift by the end of the 1540s, due to the preferences of his own court patron, the Duke of Ferrara. Lastly, Giraldis criticizes Speroni’s style, focusing mainly on artificial, specifically

<sup>74</sup> Roaf, pg. 151.

<sup>75</sup> After citing an example from the *Canace*, the Florentine responds: “Parvi che questo sia un modo di dire solenne e da deversi porre innanzi a gli occhi per vera forma di descrivere una Reina che parla con una sua fedele? Non si vede già qui altro che una figura di una strema affettazione e di una mendicata e viziosa arte, senza lune alcuno di natura.” Roaf, pg. 144.

<sup>76</sup> Roaf, pg. 144. In reality, the anonymous Florentine refers his listeners to his own “Retorica,” thereby further proving that he is B. Cavalcanti. Giraldis, in his *Romanzi* (pg. 93) also expresses similar ideas: “il più bello artificio è con tanta arte nascondere che a pena vi si scorga.” Cavalcanti worked on the *Retorica* from 1541-48, though it was printed only in 1559. He sent a letter to Pietro Vettori in 1545 containing four books of the text, in which the third explicitly deals with style. For more, see Roaf, pg. 176, note 224. Of further interest, among other things, is a section against the “stile artificioso” (pg. 250).

<sup>77</sup> Giraldis also writes that shorter verses are allowable in specific instances where harmony is required, such as the chorus or in sections which are explicitly meant to be sung.

lyrical, figures. Such overuse of affected lyrical artifice is further associated with Padua, in particular Speroni's Accademia degli Infiammati.

It is clear that this critique does not arise from Giraldi's reading of Aristotle. Since the *Poetics* does not offer a model for the creation of properly tragic language, Giraldi turns instead to a familiar rhetorical framework that provides a method for criticizing actual poetic practice. This position is also ultimately a mixture of Bembo and Trissino; on the one hand, he seeks to contain any radical form of experimentation that moves too far beyond conventional forms, which are acceptable precisely because they are already enjoyable. He takes specific aim at any novel form that exceeds a certain kind of "naturalness" of poetic language in favor of affected artificiality. This position appears to defend a certain aesthetic sensibility grounded in clarity and simplicity. On the other hand, Giraldi also incorporates Trissino's theoretical discussion of drama, as well as his use of *verso sciolto*. Such a position works well with his larger beliefs about poetry, since unrhymed verse will prove to be the most "natural" form of drama available.

In the end, Giraldi continues to focus on the same issues that have concerned writers since the beginning of the century. How does one establish a proper, long-lasting literature that contains the same genres seen in Antiquity? Who decides what kind of language is acceptable? Though ostensibly these issues are all used here to discuss tragedy, the status of epic is virtually inevitable, as it shares the general aesthetic—and stylistic—problems of *gravitas*, elevation, and magnificence.

Considering the opposing positions that seem to emerge out of Giraldi's critique, it is worth keeping in mind further questions concerning both theoretical and practical continuities with later writers in the sixteenth century. If Torquato Tasso, son of Bernardo, will later study in Padua in the early 1560s, and more specifically at the house of Sperone Speroni, is it possible to establish a relationship between the artificiality of the Infiammati in the 1540s with his own later "mannerist" experimentation? Should we not begin to consider divergent strands of poetic thinking in the early half of the sixteenth century that continue over the following decades? In fact, is it a surprise that the problem of "natural" in contrast to "artificial" language will also return as a component not only of Tasso's epic style but also as a major criticism levied against his poem by the Accademia della Crusca? Rather than answer this question here, let us return to Speroni's response to the criticisms put forward by Giraldi.

3.3 THE *canace* DEBATE: SPERONI

Although Giraldi's *Giudizio* seems to have circulated widely in the late 1540s, it was most likely its publication in 1550 that finally prompted Speroni to respond.<sup>78</sup> He composed—though never finished—an *Apologia* some time in the early 1550s. Despite the unfinished state of this work, Speroni would continue to respond to Giraldi's objections in a series of lectures given to the Accademia degli Elevati in Padua in 1557–58. In both the *Apologia* and his lectures, Speroni follows the same general sequence of Giraldi's argument. The first half deals with issues of subject matter and characters, while the second half addresses questions of language. Unlike Giraldi, Speroni does not explicitly address problems of style, instead focusing exclusively on meter. Despite the largely incomplete nature of Speroni's responses, they offer further insight into issues of imitation and experimentation as first described in his *Dialogo della retorica*.

There are three main points to emphasize in Speroni's approach to the debate. First, he begins with the apparently Giraldian claim that dramatic meter should imitate normal speech. Yet, rather than discuss "natural" language in terms of contemporary spoken language, he focuses instead on identifying the modern vernacular metrical equivalent to the Greek iamb. Central to this discussion of "modern" classical forms is a larger discussion on the aesthetic character of different metrical schemes, and here he returns to the concept of *gravitas*. Second, Speroni subtly shifts his discussion of natural language from issues of poetic nature ("natura") to contemporary usage ("uso"), where the two concepts become virtually interchangeable. This distinction allows Speroni to critique Giraldi's understanding of modern customs and their influence on poetic experimentation. Finally, this issue of custom leads Speroni to a larger problem concerning the relationship between imitation and innovation. For Speroni, poets must look outside conventional language, in this case Tuscan, in order to develop a properly elevated style that will form the basis for not only tragedy, but also epic. This point is made largely by looking at the example of Dante, who runs like a red thread throughout the majority of Speroni's defense of the novelty of his tragic project. Ultimately, at stake in Speroni's various and dispersed discussions of language is the improvement of the vernacular. Indeed, the *Apologia* itself seems to open with a call to arms: "mostriamo in così facendo che già sia tale questa volgare, onde ora parlano gli italiani, che né alla greca né alla latina, non diffidiamo di pareggiarla."<sup>79</sup>

<sup>78</sup> For a description of the circulation of Giraldi's text, see Roaf's introduction.

<sup>79</sup> Roaf, pg. 190.

3.3.1 *Reproducing Classical Meters*

In order to understand the degree to which Speroni hopes to “equal” classical literature, let us turn to the *Apologia* and to the section defending the irregularly rhymed “versi rotti” of the *Canace*. To justify his use in the *Canace* of both uneven line lengths and irregular rhyming, Speroni establishes two corresponding principles, one concerning the proper imitation of “natural” dialogue, and the other relying on the Aristotelian notion of a “refined” and “harmonious” language. According to Speroni, vernacular drama—if it is to properly adapt classical drama—should use a metrical form that most clearly resembles spoken language.<sup>80</sup> For Speroni, Greek dramatists chose a shorter, iambic line in order to produce this effect. By extension, vernacular drama should use as its basic line the heptasyllable, rather than hendecasyllable.<sup>81</sup> Speroni thus calls into question the entirety of vernacular drama—specifically tragedy—from the early sixteenth century, from Trissino’s *Sofonisba* to Giovanni Rucellai’s *Rosmunda* (both composed ca. 1514-15) to Giralaldi’s recent *Orbecche* (1541), all of which relied on unrhymed hendecasyllabic lines.<sup>82</sup>

Regarding his use of rhyme, Speroni turns surprisingly to Aristotle’s *Poetics*, where the philosopher claims that tragic language should “pleasing” (“soave”) and “refined” (“gentile”). It seems that, for Speroni, Aristotle specifies the use of such aesthetically charged language in order to differentiate it from prose (“Vuole adunque Aristotele che la imitazione della tragedia si debba fare, non con ogni sermone, ma con soave e gentile, e questo esclude la prosa”).<sup>83</sup> This reference to prose echoes Tolomei’s condemnation of *verso sciolto*, which lacks “spirito” and “nerbo.”<sup>84</sup> Speroni seems to be making the same point, implying that Giralaldi’s preferred meter (i.e. *verso sciolto*) runs the risk of falling into prose, rather than sustaining a refined form of language.<sup>85</sup> Speroni thus champions

80 “[I]n ogni lingua quello di tutti i versi dovrebbe esser più tragico che più è atto a imitare i nostri alterni ragionamenti, ché ciò è il proprio della tragedia; e quello a ciò fare è più atto, il quale in favellando a vicenda, spesse fiate, senza alcun studio, formiamo, quasi all’uomo sia naturale, la testura di cotal verso.” Roaf, pg. 195.

81 “E tale [verso tragico] è il giambo e l’eptassillabo, quello in Grecia, questo in Italia, e non l’esametro e l’endecassillabo.” Roaf, pg. 195.

82 It is important to note that there was also a large number of translations of Greek tragedies, beginning in the same period as the Orti Oricellari in Florence. For an overview, see *Teatro del Cinquecento*, ed. Renzo Cremante, vol 1. Milan-Naples: Ricciardi, 1988.

83 Roaf, pg. 196.

84 See chapter 2.3.

85 As we shall see in the next chapter, Matteo San Martino will make virtually the same point in a letter to Claudio Tolomei on heroic meter from 1551: “parermi dico che in nessun modo lo heroico stile rappresentino [i versi sciolti], che ancor che con natural vena di gonfiato furor della musa sopra il comune uso transcendendo i versi snodino, pur quasi a superbo cavallo in corso che senza freno per ritenerlo stia ci rassomigliano, il che a gli hesametri senza il ritegno de’ suoi piedi di pari averebbe. Oltre che, non essendo da collegamento di rime o d’altro artificio concatenati, poco da la prosa differiscono, però che nel parlar quotidiano spesso



the occasional use of rhyme in his tragedy, as it ultimately helps produce a “pleasing conversation,” containing both rhythm and harmony (“[un] soave ragionamento, pien di numero e d’armonia”).<sup>86</sup>

This formulation comes directly from Aristotle, whom Speroni cites again when he defines the proper form of tragedy:

Or avegna che la tragedia sia imitazione, non d’ogni nostra azione, della illustre, e sia sua propria materia il portentoso (per così dire) e il mirabile, cosa che convenevolmente trattandosi, gravemente si dee trattare.<sup>87</sup>

Despite relying on a clear Aristotelian definition, Speroni nevertheless returns to the same issue of linguistic decorum seen everywhere: serious matters must have a serious linguistic form (“gravemente si dee trattare”). As a result, of crucial importance is making sense of the proper *form* of tragedy. Speroni attempts to rely somewhat on the *Poetics* to make sense of this problem—largely by discounting prosaic language—, though his solutions are rather idiosyncratic.

Having thus established that heptasyllable is the basic unit of dramatic discourse, Speroni thus turns to the problem of the proper treatment of tragic themes. Aware that rhymed heptasyllable may not produce a sense of *gravitas*, Speroni then argues for the irregular insertion of lines of hendecasyllable in his tragedy, thereby producing the “versi rotti” that bothered Giraldi so much.<sup>88</sup> Speroni’s justification relies on the apparently common knowledge that the hendecasyllable is the most serious of verse forms, as it possesses both “vastità” and an “immensa sua gravità.”<sup>89</sup>

To further defend this use of uneven lines, Speroni takes up Giraldi’s claim about the similarity between his metrical scheme and the lyrical “frottola.” Speroni finds such a comparison unsuitable, since another form of lyrical poetry does, in reality, possess a similarly uneven structure while also allowing for the treatment of “materia grave,” the

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si formano, secondo la Poetica d’Aristotele che ivi allegasti, di heroico stile per ciò inetti rendendosi.” This letter, among others addressed to Tolomei about meter, can be found appended to his treatise *Osservazioni grammaticali*, 1555.

86 Roaf, pg. 199. The reference to rhythm and harmony comes directly from Aristotle’s *Poetics*, which we will address later.

87 See Roaf, pg. 195.

88 Speroni also includes occasional *quinari*, but their presence (and Speroni’s justification) are largely irrelevant to our discussion.

89 Roaf, pg. 199. He writes that hendecasyllable is “il più intero, per conseguente il più grave di tutti i versi volgari.” See Roaf, pg. 195. He also earlier cites Dante’s *De vulgari eloquentia*, which claims that it is the most “celebrated” form, “sì di occupazione di tempo, come di capacità di sentenze e d’altre cose sì fatte, le quali per lo dovere rendono lui celeberrimo sopra quanti ne può formare la nostra lingua moderna.” Roaf, pg. 194. The original text from Dante’s treatise reads: “quello [verso] di undici syllabe pare essere il superiore, sì di occupazione di tempo, come di capacità di sentenze, di costruzioni, e di vocaboli.” See Trissino’s translation from 1529, section II.v. Cited in Roaf pg. 204, n. 55.

*canzone*.<sup>90</sup> As further justification of this point, Speroni turns to the theory and practice of Dante, one of the “learned and judicious” poets (“dotti e giudizioso rimatori”) who perfected this metrical form.<sup>91</sup> For Speroni, as for Giraldi, vernacular lyric poetry thus offers potential metrical schemes for help in the imitation of “serious” classical forms. However, rather than Petrarch, Speroni relies on Dante, specifically the discussion found in his *De vulgari eloquentia*. As a result, he further signals his departure from a more Bembian conception of vernacular literary practice.

Dante becomes a fundamental authority for Speroni, providing a theoretical foundation upon which to conceptualize a “tragic style,” which is not necessarily the style of tragedy itself, but a more general elevated vernacular language.<sup>92</sup> Although Speroni begins his defense by debating his use of a peculiar metrical form, he shifts his focus to the creation of an elevated and artificial stylistic register, one which he calls “aulico e illustre,” following Dante. His earlier discussion of “natural” alternating dialogue, and the imitation of Greek iambs, becomes merely a pretext for the more general problem of expanding the aesthetic range of vernacular forms. The *Poetics* offers a starting point, that of “pleasing speech” (“sermone soave”), which excludes any meter that appears to be prose. Yet the specific form of this poetic language is left ambiguous.<sup>93</sup> Speroni thus turns to Dante’s theory of elevated language in order to elaborate on expanding the range of formal possibilities. Unfortunately, his unfinished *Apologia* ends here, and we have to look elsewhere for a continued discussion of these issues.

### 3.3.2 *The Use of Rhyme*

This concern with identifying an elevated poetic language becomes more pronounced in Speroni’s lectures on meter, which he read before the Accademia degli Elevati in Padua

<sup>90</sup> Concerning the frottola, Speroni writes that it is a “componimento al parer de’ dotti e giudiziosi rimatori di poco considerazione, non possa esser da materia grave.” Roaf, pg. 196.

<sup>91</sup> Roaf, pg. 196.

<sup>92</sup> Speroni refers specifically to Dante’s praise of the style of the *canzone*, “il cui stile oltre ad ogni altro commendata, e a lui solo, lasciando indietro e la ballata e il sonetto, dona il titolo d’essere aulico e illustre, quale al tragico si conviene.” Roaf, pg. 196.

<sup>93</sup> Speroni cites directly from the commentary of the *Poetics* by Vincenzo Maggi and Bartolomeo Lombardi, *In Aristotelis librum de poetica communes explanationes*, Venezia, 1550. In *particula XXXIV*, the definition of tragedy appears: “Tragoedia est imitatio actionis illustris, absolutae, magnitudinem habentis, sermone suavi.” As Maggi writes: “dictum est, duas esse Poeseos naturales causas, quarum altera carmen erat. carmen autem sermonem suum esse apertum est.” In *particula XXXV*, we also find “Sermonem suum appello, in quo numerus, harmonia et melos inest.” See the 1550 edition, pg. 96. Maggi does not offer any useful insight into the problem of a “sermonem suum,” but it is clear that Speroni is citing this edition directly.

in 1557-58.<sup>94</sup> Picking up where he left off in the *Apologia*, he focuses almost exclusively on questions of rhyme; however, unlike in the earlier work, he moves from a discussion of tragedy to poetry in general. While poets such as Trissino, Alamanni, and Bernardo highlight the distracting nature of rhyming in any attempt to produce gravity, Speroni emphasizes the fact that rhymes are, in reality, necessary for almost all forms of vernacular poetry.

Responding to the arguments made by defenders of *verso sciolto* concerning the merely sensible pleasure of rhymes, Speroni insists that both the intellect and the ear derive satisfaction: “E’ anche la rima seggio, fine e riposo dell’orecchie e dello intelletto.”<sup>95</sup> His point is rather straightforward. On the one hand, the ear enjoys the “harmony” (“concinnità”) produced by alternating accents and the “unified sound” (“unisono”) of rhymes. On the other hand, the intellect finds moments of repose when it arrives at the rhyme, since the “thought” (“sentenza”) also comes to an end.<sup>96</sup> Thus, while the early proponents of *verso sciolto* complained that they were forced to tether thought to rhyme, Speroni makes this relationship a crucial element of rhymed poetry: “Dunque nel verso senza rima non riposa né l’orecchia né lo intelletto.”<sup>97</sup>

Despite this insistence on the necessity of rhyme, Speroni makes the important distinction between rhyming according to fixed schemes and the “free rhymes” (“rime libere”) of his tragedy. He appears to agree with the point, brought up by Trissino in the *Sofonisba* and by Giraldi in his *Giudizio*, that a rigid rhyme scheme suggests “forethought” (“pensamento”) on the part of the poet. In response, Speroni offers a middle way between the “forethought” of rigid structures and prosaic language by claiming that a poet can simply vary the frequency of rhymes. In fact, by using irregular spacing, a poet can actually produce a more natural texture, which obscures such “pensamento”: “Bisogna adunque che ’l nostro verso pensatamente sia fatto, ma che ’l pensiero non apparisca; e ciò si asseguisce ove le rime son libere, però le usavano omini rozzi senza pensiero. Ma il verso senza rima non è pensato e è stupido, senza sale e insulso.”<sup>98</sup> In a peculiar echo

94 It is worth noting that Bernardino Tomitano, the author of the work lambasted by Giraldi, was also a member of the Elevati. For a brief introduction to the Elevati, which was active from 1557 to 1560, see M. Maylender and L. Rava. *Storia delle accademie d’Italia*. Bologna: L. Cappelli, 1926, v. II, pp. 263-65.

95 Roaf, pg. 303.

96 “Quanto a quello dello ’ntelletto è gran riposo in sulla rima, perché sopra quella le più volte finisce la sentenza, la quale è pasto dello intelletto.” Roaf, pg. 304.

97 Roaf, pg. 303. This point is also worth noting because it is precisely the disruption of this harmony between *sentenza* and *rima* that proves to be central to the poetic innovation of Giovanni Della Casa in the late 1540s and 1550s and which will be fundamental to Torquato Tasso’s theory of epic style.

98 Roaf, pg. 304.

of the *Giudizio*, Speroni thus emphasizes the need to use a method for “hiding” certain structures, much in the same way that Giraldis requires hiding one’s “arte.”

While this discussion applies to Speroni’s tragedy, the question, relevant to our larger discussion, emerges: does Speroni’s requirement of rhyme—irregular or not—carry over into epic poetry? Does the possibility of using “free rhymes” solve the problem of needing to choose between fixed schemes and blank verse? As we have seen, it is possible that Speroni may have drawn on the metrical experimentation of Brocardo, and possibly Bernardo. Speroni acknowledges the former’s epic metrical “alchemy” in the *Dialogo della retorica*, and Giraldis further accuses Speroni of adopting such irregular forms. Yet, Bernardo’s letter from 1543 also suggests that Speroni had argued for the use of *verso sciolto* for his own *Amadigi*. Unfortunately, Speroni nowhere offers a clear point of view about proper epic meter in the vernacular; however, this silence on meter does not necessarily mean that Speroni does not have a larger conception of epic language and style.

In fact, in his discussion of rhyme, Speroni makes a crucial point concerning specifically epic language. Returning to Aristotle’s ambiguous statements in the *Poetics*, Speroni claims that epic meter should be the most “stable” (“stabile”).<sup>99</sup> He quotes directly from the *Poetics*, claiming that the “eroico esser numero ‘maxime stabile et turgidum.’”<sup>100</sup> For Speroni, the terms “stable” and “turgid” become central to understanding epic language. Indeed, he repeats both words later when differentiating between the “mobility” of tragic verse and the “stability” of epic:

[N]ella nostra tragedia non cape lo endecasillabo per esser verso immobile e non atto alla mobilità delle azioni umane e cose agende che in tragedia si trattano: e tanto manco quello che è senza rime si dovesse mai usar, il che niego, manco male saria lo usarlo nell’eroico che nella tragedia, perché nell’eroico conviene la stabilità e turgidità, ove non si rappresentano azioni umane, ma per *narrationem* si imita.<sup>101</sup>

Much like Brocardo’s position concerning the new alchemists of heroic poetry, Speroni seems more open to the possibility of unrhymed verse in epic poetry. Though it is diffi-

99 Speroni also makes a further point about the “wondrous” character of epic, though he does not go into any detail about this particularly interesting issue. “Però il verso a colui [a l’agente] si de’ convenire, cioè all’operazione sua, per la qual causa lo ammirando e meraviglioso è più convenevole all’eroico che alla tragedia; perché nell’eroico non si considera tanto la azione quanto nella tragedia, e perché le azioni vogliono essere naturali e non ammirabili, però la tragedia non è così ammirabile come la epopeia.” Roaf, pg. 265. The notion of admiration is taken from particula CXXXII of Maggi’s 1550 edition: “Sanè convenit Tragoe diae ipsum praeberē mirandum, magis autem Epopoeiae: quod videlicet proportionē respondeat. ideoque mirandum maxime huic convenit: quoniam in ea ad ipsum agentem minime respicimus.” See pg. 262.

100 This section can be found in Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1459b-1460a. In reality, Speroni quotes directly from Vincenzo Maggi’s 1550 edition: “numerorum omnium stabilissimum, atque turgidissimum heroicum est.” This edition contains commentary written by Vincenzo Maggi and Bartolomeo Lombardi, the latter of which actually dedicated the work to Speroni’s Accademia degli Infiammati. Maggi’s text is cited in Roaf, pg. 272, n. 42.

101 Roaf, pg. 265.

cult to assign a fixed opinion to Speroni on the matter of epic meter (“manco male saria usarlo”), we can still follow his usage of these terms drawn on the *Poetics* in order to make sense of his more general interest in the production of elevated language. Indeed, although the notion of “stability” seems to confirm the notion that hexameter and hendecasyllable are the best verse forms for epic, we are left wondering what “turgidità” means. Is it merely another feature of the metrical structure or is it related to language or style?

Though Speroni does not quote the full passage here, the rest of this section from the *Poetics* offers us some insight. Aristotle writes that the stability of epic meter is appropriate because it allows for two specific things: “foreign languages” and “metaphors”: “Quo sane sit, ut linguas, atque translationes potissimum admittat. Nam motus ipse enarrativus prae cunctis aliis excellens est.”<sup>102</sup> If epic verse allows for these two elements, do they constitute the quality of *turgidità*? Although Speroni once more leaves his analysis incomplete in these lectures on meter, it will become clear in his other writings that both “languages” and “metaphors” are fundamental elements for the creation of an elevated language. His primary example continues to be one specific poet, Dante.

### 3.3.3 *Metaphors and Languages in Dante*

Throughout Speroni’s lectures on tragic meter, Dante has already become central to a defense of the metrical experimentation in the *Canace*. The argument relies directly on Dante’s conception of elevated style in his *De vulgari eloquentia*, which Speroni cites:

Dante per stile tragico non intende da tragedia, ma intende alto, illustre, aulico, cortigian, cardinale, e vuol che questo sia delle canzoni. E in una sola parola lo chiama tragico, volendo che questa parola ‘tragico’, tolta da tragedia, poema sopra li altri eccellente e magnifico, significhi la dignità della canzone.<sup>103</sup>

Despite the justification for his peculiar meter and rhyme scheme, Speroni returns to the development of the vernacular through the creation of a specifically elevated register. He prioritizes a more general style—which Dante calls “tragic”—rather than identifying different genres which may participate in that style. Indeed, with this citation, there is an indiscriminate confluence of tragedy, lyric, and—by implication—epic, given that Dante, in this very section of the *De vulgari eloquentia*, is discussing Virgil’s *Aeneid* as the prime example of “tragedy.” For Speroni, it is crucial to shift from distinguishing between genres

<sup>102</sup> *Poetics*, 1459b, quoted from Maggi’s edition.

<sup>103</sup> Roaf, pg. 259.

to a broader interest in an elevated style, as it allows him to identify and develop proper stylistic models. For instance, if there is no genre-specific elevated language, but rather a general “stile tragico,” Speroni can justify using the *canzone*, with its irregular meters and rhyme schemes, as a metrical model for his own tragedy.

If we expand our analysis outside of Speroni’s lectures to several of his other works, we find a consistent discussion of the elevation of the vernacular following Dante’s model. Several of his later texts explore this issue, specifically his two *Discorsi sopra Dante*, the *Dialogo della istoria*, and the *Discorso dell’arte oratoria*. Central to these discussions is Dante himself, who becomes not merely a theoretical authority or a stylist to imitate, but rather a practical example for incorporating new linguistic forms in the sixteenth century. Crucial to Speroni’s understanding of Dante’s ability to expand the vernacular is his use of both metaphors and foreign languages, the same two elements offered by Aristotle in his discussion of epic meter.

Speroni composed the two *Discorsi sopra Dante* in response to a treatise published in the early 1570s by a certain Ridolfo Castravilla who criticizes the *Divina Commedia*.<sup>104</sup> Much like the defense of his tragedy, the first section treats philosophical and moral issues, while the second focuses on language. In this second section, Speroni spends a significant amount of time addressing the novelty of Dante’s style compared with the unsophisticated state of the language during Dante’s time:

E’ anche da sapere che Dante in molti luoghi del suo poema si dole di non aver lingua nè ingegno atto a parlar nè del bene, nè del male, che avea veduto; perchè in vero fin al suo tempo non era stata usata la lingua Tosca, se non a parlar di cose basse: e fu egli il primo che la innalzò.<sup>105</sup>

According to Speroni, since the Tuscan language was so deficient in the thirteenth century, Dante was forced to rely on “mixing languages,” following in the footsteps of his teacher Brunetto Latini, who wrote in French in order to avoid the apparent crudeness of his own tongue.<sup>106</sup> Dante, however, enlarged his own vocabulary by drawing on both a wide variety of other Italian dialects and Latin:

Le locuzioni di Dante son Toscanissimi sempremai più di quale altro che mai scrivesse Toscano: li vocaboli non sempremai: perchè la lingua non usata a

<sup>104</sup> Castravilla’s treatise situated itself primarily against Benedetto Varchi’s Ercolano, with Dante’s Comedy serving as a faulty example of vernacular literature. Castravilla was born probably in the second quarter of the 16th century. He frequented the major Sienese academic groups, and composed his treatise probably after 1570, when Varchi’s dialogue on language was published posthumously. See Nicola Longo, “Castravilla, Ridolfo.” In: *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 22, 1979.

<sup>105</sup> Speroni, *Opere* (1740), V, pg. 507.

<sup>106</sup> “Dante nel libro della Volgare Eloquenzia reprobà ogni linguaggio semplice di tutta Italia, ed approva il misto. e di questa sua opinione fu il suo maestro Brunetto Latini; il quale essendo Fiorentino, scrisse, per meglio fare, in lingua Francese.” *Opere*, V, pg. 507.

significare così alti concetti, come era il suo, non li avea ancora formati. esso li prende or dal latino, or dalle altre provincie d'Italia. onde si può dir che egli imiti Omero, il quale non volse scrivere il suo poema in lingua Attica, ma in ogni lingua, che fosse Greca.<sup>107</sup>

Along with Dante, Homer also becomes a model for linguistic variety, all in the name of properly expressing “alti concetti.” This description mirrors Speroni’s own justification for experimenting in the *Canace*, a point made by Giraldi in his *Giudizio*, when one of the interlocutors says that Speroni refused *versi sciolti* because it was insufficient for expressing his ideas (“a lui parso che i versi trovati dal Trissino non fossero atti ad isprimere la qualità de’ suoi concetti. E però egli ha voluto usare questi versi molto più convenevoli a’ suoi spiriti che quelli”).<sup>108</sup> Although Giraldi’s characters will go on to mock the quality of Speroni’s “concetti,” it is clear that Speroni had initiated a broader conversation on the need to develop different vernacular styles to account for expanding conceptual requirements.

Yet it is more than a question of expanding the lexicon and *vocaboli*. Speroni also emphasizes Dante’s ability to invent new metaphors where “proper” language was deficient. He also returns to his earlier point about the introduction of new words, although including French in his list of source languages:

E se ello nella opera della Volgare Eloquenzia dice chiara, che la lingua e lo stile alto, quale è il suo, non può esser puro Toscano? e di qua viene che Dante è il più metaforico poeta che mai scrivesse, ricorrendo a’ translati ove mancava de’ proprii, e formando de’ proprii, togliendoli dal Latino, o dal Francese.<sup>109</sup>

Speroni admits that some of these new words may be been unpleasant or “pedagogici,” but Dante was merely following the necessities of proper expression. Moreover, in Speroni’s view, not even Petrarch is innocent of similarly irregular linguistic usage, as he too created “novi vocaboli pedagogici, e molto strani.”<sup>110</sup>

Speroni’s insistence on the need for poets to invent metaphors and borrow words from other languages leads him to challenge other positions on linguistic innovation. His target appears to be the Tuscans:

<sup>107</sup> *Opere*, V, 510-11.

<sup>108</sup> Roaf, pg. 132.

<sup>109</sup> *Opere*, V, pg. 511. The notion of Dante as the most “metaphorical” poet also occurs in Varchi, suggesting a further alignment between their positions. Of course Speroni may simply be adopting this position as a rhetorical persona, but the arguments are so similar across Speroni’s works that it is difficult to see this as merely an exercise.

<sup>110</sup> Speroni writes, “il Petrarca imitando Dante forma novi vocaboli pedagogici, e molto strani; e non si può difender con Aristotile. Dironne alquanti con un poco di ordine: attarda, aggiorna, auro, ab experto, avulse, a tergo, aborre, [...] texta, torpo, trillustre, volve, vosco, vibra, zappadar. Or così stando la cosa di questa lingua, perché non arrossano tutti coloro, che riprendono Dante dell’altrui difetto?” *Opere*, V, pg. 511.

Dante adunque fu primo e sommo, che scrivesse in tal lingua sue cose alte.  
[...] Però cessi la question, qual sia la lingua volgare al presente, e qual fosse  
l'antica: perciocchè l'antica povera è fatta ricca dalli autori allegati, e non dal  
popolo di Toscana, e più onorata che giammai fusse.<sup>111</sup>

While this disagreement no doubt relates to the fact that Castravilla is Sienese, there is also the larger problem—inherited from the positions of the *questione della lingua*—of locating the driving force behind linguistic innovation in general. Against the notion that the people of Tuscany somehow organically develop the best language, Speroni continues to claim that it was through the conscious adoption of foreign and strange words, along with the invention of more expressive metaphors, that produced the best literary forms in use.

This same point is made against those who use *verso sciolto*, “[i]l verso senza rima è rifugio delli ignoranti delle lingue e delle metafore, le quali mancando la rima non si usano.”<sup>112</sup> He continues to rely on the criteria of “languages” and “metaphors” for determining poetic skill, which suggests a direct connection to Aristotle’s definition of epic poetry from the *Poetics*. Though he does not refer to Dante as an epic poet, it is also clear that Speroni has a specifically Aristotelian framework in mind for further conceptualizing Dante’s linguistic innovation. Indeed, Speroni will later pair Dante directly with the Stagyrite: “Formò Dante vocaboli novi per meglio esprimere il suo concetto: ed in ciò seguì la dottrina d’Aristotele.”<sup>113</sup>

Speroni relies on a similar description of the poverty of the vernacular in the second part of his *Dialogo della istoria* (composed in the early 1580s), which, though concerned generally with the genre of history, addresses the thorny issue of what sort of language to use for such works. While the discourses on Dante were invested in determining Dante’s contributions to the language of his period, Speroni focuses here on the establishment of the correct language for vernacular historiography. In the second part of this dialogue, the interlocutors address the problem of the vernacular lacking a proper style for historical writing. Indeed, one of the characters laments:

dalla debolezza di questa tenera nostra lingua, che non ha ancora, second voi, ali nè piedi, così infermo come io mi sono, mi dà il cuore di dimostrativamente provare, che ella sia atta a null'altra cosa, che a dover dir solamente parlando in bocca di alcuna femmina il verno al foco, o in qualche prato la state tra l'erba e fiori la novelletta di quel Ferondo o della Alibecche, sì bassamente che

<sup>111</sup> *Opere*, V, pg. 511.

<sup>112</sup> *Opere*, V, pg. 515.

<sup>113</sup> *Opere*, V, pg. 511.



appena si oda; e non a scriver le paci e l'armi delle repubbliche o de' monarchi per divulgarle.<sup>114</sup>

The participants in the dialogue begin to debate the merits of following Bembo's prescriptions on prose style, which requires the imitation of Boccaccio's language in the *Decameron*. This option seems unsatisfactory, and one of them puts it rather succinctly, "non par cosa possibile, che 'l basso stilo delle Novelle si possa tanto innalzare, che arrivi al titolo della istoria."<sup>115</sup> This rejection of Boccaccio as the sole model for producing prose works establishes a clear continuity between Speroni's earlier *Dialogo della retorica* and his later discussion of the creation of a properly "historical" language. The issue remains largely the same: where does one begin to construct such a style, which tends to be more "elevated" than the linguistic examples found in Boccaccio?

While the earlier dialogue was ambiguous concerning the creation of a new form, Speroni offers a possible solution to the issue of developing a historiographical language. The interlocutor Giacomo Zabarella, Speroni's mouthpiece in the dialogue, points to Dante as the clear model to follow. "avventuroso e giudicioso sarà lo storico, il quale a Dante siccome a guida si accostarà, per trarre a fin la sua impresa."<sup>116</sup> Zabarella further claims that Dante offers a clear model of a poet who stepped outside the relatively limited range of subjects that would later be found in Petrarch. In fact, according to Zabarella, Petrarch's singing of love, despite its beauty, is restricted to diction related entirely to those themes.<sup>117</sup> Zabarella argues instead for the creation of a "comun romanzo," a language that draws on words from both various Italian dialects, as well as other romance languages:

Nè si de' il Tosco meravigliare, che nell'ufficio di far l'istoria, il comun romanzo, il quale accoglie diverse voci, non tutte belle egualmente, sia preferito al Toscano solo, cioè al perfetto fra le altre lingue d'Italia.

Zabarella returns to the example of Homer, whose works were also written in a "common language" ("linguaggio comune") rather than just one or another dialect ("non Ionico nè di Atene").<sup>118</sup> In case the origin of these ideas was unclear for his interlocutors, Zabarella concludes by stating that his conception of an elevated, national language comes from

<sup>114</sup> *Opere*, II, pg. 254.

<sup>115</sup> *Opere*, II, pg. 271.

<sup>116</sup> *Opere*, II, pg. 272.

<sup>117</sup> "[L]a sua lingua volgare [i.e. di Petrarca], d'amor parlando, più volentieri, dove ella è intesa, ascoltarsi da gente umana e civile, che nessuna altra che ne ragioni per ogni luogo dell'universo. segno certissimo, che 'l linguaggio da noi usato a significare le passioni dell'animo ritraggendole in voce aperta, vuol nondimeno nascer con quelle [...] perciocchè intero involato dell'altrui bocche, mal nella nostra può risonare nè confacersi alla nostra mente." *Opere*, II, pg. 277.

<sup>118</sup> *Opere*, II, pg. 278.

Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia*. Indeed, he repeats the same language used by Speroni earlier when drawing on Dante: "Vuole ancora [Dante] che 'l vulgar nostro moderno basso da se, a farlo aulico, tragico, e cortigiano, cioè nobile [...] debba esser preso dalle provincie di tutta Italia, che molte sono e diverse."<sup>119</sup> Speroni thus relies on Dante's conception of a general cultivated language in order to develop more specifically an elevated style for history.

Speroni also uses Dante as an example to justify the use of specifically unpleasant and harsh language. Later in the *Dialogo della istoria* one of the interlocutors proposes discussing the variety of styles that may appear in historiography ("tutti i stili, che proprii son dell'istoria"). According to the discussion that unfolds, history treats of many different kinds of subjects, thus requiring a variety of styles.<sup>120</sup> In other words, the elevated style seen previously is merely one of a wide array of possible manners of writing. This point is not particularly surprising, given Speroni's continued insistence on the correct expression of one's ideas ("concetti").

Yet to develop the stylistic variety required by the wide range of historical themes, Zabarella suggests also looking at the example of chivalric romance, referring to an unnamed poet:

Voi mi fate tornare a mente un compositor di romanzi, il qual parlando di quei giganti [...] si dilettaua di usar vocaboli lunghi, orridi, e risonanti; aspri e intricati nelli incantesimi; poi nelli casi amorosi solea lisciar le sue stanze, e pettinarle in maniera, che a' madrigali si assimigliavano.

Unfortunately for our analysis, Speroni introduces the matter of chivalric romance without dwelling on the form. Of interest, however, is the fact that the *romanzo* also permits a wide range of stylistic registers, including those that make use of bizarre language. Speroni does not see the use of such "harsh" or "horrid" words as a stylistic fault. Instead, it is precisely the appositeness of such figures that guarantees their success.<sup>121</sup>

In order to justify the use of this sort of "harsh" language, the interlocutors return to the example of Dante. Yet rather than repeat points made concerning the *De vulgari eloquentia*, Zabarella turns to Dante's "stony lady" poems and the opening verses of *Inferno* XXXII:

e dimandato della cagione perché facesse così [i.e. choosing a harsh style],  
Dante allegava nella canzone, che par che piaccia al Petrarca, la qual comincia:

<sup>119</sup> *Opere*, II, pg. 278.

<sup>120</sup> "... la qual composta di molte parti e diverse molto, tutte ritrarle ad un modo istesso non vuol ragione, nè lo permette la esperienza." *Opere*, II, pg. 321.

<sup>121</sup> The identity of this poet is unclear. Given the fact that this dialogue was written in the 1580s, there are quite a few options.

*Così nel mio parlar voglio essere aspro,  
 Come nelli atti questa bella pietra:  
 con quel che siegue. Allegavalo similmente là nello Inferno, quando egli dice:  
 Se io avessi le rime aspre e chiocchie,  
 Come si converebbe al tristo bujo:  
 ne' quei due luoghi chiaro appare, che le parole di chi ragiona non deono esser  
 diverse dalla materia di cui si parla.<sup>122</sup>*

At stake, once again, are issues of the inadequacy of language and the need for linguistic decorum, both of which pardon the use of seemingly abrasive or harsh language in the name of a more coherent style. Although there is no further discussion of these examples, it is clear that Speroni has substantially widened his interest in developing—practically and theoretically—available forms of expression in the vernacular. Despite the large gap separating this work from Speroni's *Canace*, this sustained defense of using unconventional languages, metaphors, and “harsh” sounds could easily function as an implicit reply to the criticisms of “patavinità” made by Giraldi in his *Giudizio*.<sup>123</sup>

Speroni finds that contemporary vernacular poetry lacks the language to capture a wider conceptual and aesthetic range, and much of the emphasis in his works falls on the development of a theory and model of linguistic innovation. Indeed, following this discussion of harshness in the *Dialogo della istoria* there appears a lengthy section that praises innovation and novelty in general, not as something to be feared but as inevitable and necessary.<sup>124</sup> In poetic terms, innovation requires a more stable foundation, one which emerges in the figure of Dante, the same poet who had—in reality—been set aside by Bembo's earlier cultural project. Indeed Bembo discounts Dante from being the supreme poetic model in the vernacular because of his odd stylistic choices; for Speroni, it is precisely because of those oddities that Dante is valuable.

Throughout this analysis of the debate and ideas surrounding Speroni's *Canace*, we have deviated somewhat from the problems of epic form and meter as articulated in the 1530s. There is simply less material in the 1540s on the problem of epic, and the explicit position-taking on epic meter from the prior decade has largely disappeared. Bernardo's letters from 1542-43 suggest that those previous theoretical discussions have been set aside in favor of the production of epic poetry itself. It is therefore reasonable to assume

<sup>122</sup> *Opere*, II, pp. 321-322.

<sup>123</sup> “Questo mi pare oggi di particolar vizio d'alcuni di quei Padovani [...] che nell'Accademia degli Infiammati si sono intromessi [...] i quali hanno pensato che l'altezza e la gravità dello stile tutta sia nelle gonfiate voci, ne gli intricati parlari, nell'accogliere disusati modi di dire. [...] Puossi credere da alcuno che la gravità e l'altezza dello stile stia in questa tanta affettazione? In questi strepiti di voci tanto lontani da ogni natura?” Roaf, pg. 141-42.

<sup>124</sup> Such novelties include artillery, the printing press, and the new world discovered by Columbus.

that many writers were busy working on composing their own works, as is evidenced by not only Bernardo, but also Trissino and Alamanni, whose poems will be printed in 1547-48.

Yet, in this same period, debates about the proper way to emulate specifically classical styles continue to develop, focused, however, on other similar genres such as tragedy. Tragedy, much like epic, deals with “elevated” themes, and the problem, as seen in the debate over the *Canace*, continues to be that of expanding a potentially limited vernacular into new stylistic registers. For Giralaldi, the guiding principle is that of “naturalness,” which requires the use of a straightforward tragic meter, namely blank verse. For Speroni, however, there is a deeper dissatisfaction with prevailing vernacular forms and styles. While *verso sciolto* appears, at least for Giralaldi and other tragic poets, as an acceptable “new” form that captures the feel of serious classical literature, Speroni remains unconvinced. The main problem appears to be the Aristotelian reference to a “sermonem suavem,” which suggests a form of poetic language clearly distinct from prose. Speroni finds that the typical model for poetry, Petrarch, is also unsatisfactory.

To legitimize this anti-Bembian position, Speroni goes looking for an authorized method for lexical and stylistic innovation, which Dante provides not only in practice but in his own theory of elevated language. Dante’s *De vulgari eloquentia* thus serves as a way of theorizing more clearly the issues of poetic styles that appear not only in classical literature but also in works such as Aristotle’s *Poetics*, where the matter is much more ambiguous. Speroni appears to focus largely on the Aristotelian concept of “turgidity,” which seems to indicate a kind of language constructed on borrowing foreign words and inventing unexpected metaphors. This concern with developing the vernacular—always involving the example of Dante—appears everywhere in Speroni’s writing whenever he attempts to outline a method for producing genres that lie outside the conventional vernacular canon, including both tragedy and historiography. Thus while Speroni does not directly address the qualities of a specifically epic style, he is nevertheless concerned with the development of a more elevated general stylistic and aesthetic register that would encompass epic poetry.

The debate concerning Speroni’s *Canace* thus offers a useful example for making sense of shifting views on matters such as *gravitas* and linguistic elevation. We can outline two artistic—and perhaps also social—positions as exemplified by Speroni and Giralaldi. Speroni is an intellectual at the head of an influential academy, which allows him the freedom to experiment with forms such as “versi rotti” and “rime libere.” He also appears to rep-

resent a more general style of writing that leads his major critic, Giraldi, to criticize an entire group of poets and thinkers in Padua. In opposition to this manner of composition, Giraldi instead argues for a more natural form that imitates cultivated everyday conversation, namely *verso sciolto*. For Giraldi, not only is this form less affected, but it also follows recent fashions established by other poets such as Trissino. Giraldi's emphasis on adherence to fashion reappears in his brief argument for the use of *terza rima* in epic poetry. Despite formulating a theoretical justification for this meter, Giraldi will also ultimately shift his opinion to favor *ottava rima*, most likely at the behest of his own patron, Ercole II d'Este, Duke of Ferrara.

Speroni and Giraldi thus come to emblemize the same division seen in Bernardo Tasso's letters: on the one hand, an intellectual position with a certain degree of experimental autonomy; on the other, one that is attuned to current—and changing—fashions and tastes. By the early 1540s, such positions begin to both overlap and branch off in new directions, especially in light of the emergence of two major influences on conceptualizing heroic poetry, the model of Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* and the narrative theory of Aristotle's *Poetics*. Questions of "popular" and "erudite" will begin to merge as intellectuals dedicate philosophical rigor to the treatment of forms previously considered "low", such as *ottava rima*. The influence of court nobility on these thinkers and poets becomes fundamental. Although wealthy patrons may be largely indifferent to sophisticated classifying theories, they also seek to create an aura of intellectual legitimacy around "lower" and more "popular" forms which they enjoy in court. The task of certain intellectuals thus shifts from theorizing potential epic meters to developing elaborate frameworks to elevate works such as the *Furioso*. Such a process of "canonization" suggests a more complex socio-cultural stratification than that of a simple binary between "low" and "high." In the next chapter we will begin to explore this stratification by analyzing the response to the rise of Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*.

*Non ha [Ariosto] inventione alcuna, & certo è che la melonaggine degli altri Ottavi Rimatori lo fanno parere di qualche valore.*

— Ortensio Lando, *La sferza de' scrittori antichi et moderni*<sup>1</sup>

By the early 1540s, there is a growing divergence among intellectual positions that seek to justify the use of certain forms of poetry over others. This divergence appears alongside a broader turn to poetic practice away from theoretical speculation. The metrical debates of the 1530s are characterized by speculation primarily among intellectuals with an unclear view of the future of the vernacular. The larger cultural shift towards producing and critiquing actual works based on classical models leads to a different set of questions. Abstract justifications for meter give way to more concrete matters of artistic preference.

Within the debate over the *Canace* in the 1540s, for example, there are traces of two contrasting perspectives on the reproduction of classical forms in the vernacular. On the one hand, there is Speroni's erudite and academic position, which defines itself against the prevailing, largely humanist models of imitation, advocating instead for a high degree of formal experimentation. On the other, there is Giraldi's conciliatory, much more "traditional" view of vernacular poetic production, which emphasizes imitating authorized models while also adhering to contemporary tastes and preferences.<sup>2</sup> Despite the sophistication of this debate—such as determining a truly "classical" tragic meter—the tone often shifts from idealized accounts of form to statements of contrasting sensibilities, especially in Giraldi's *Giudizio*. The most striking example occurs when the characters in his dia-

<sup>1</sup> *La sferza de scrittori antichi et moderni di M. Anonimo di Utopia*. Venice: Andrea Arrivabene, 1550, pg. 21. It is generally accepted that the author of this work is the Venetian polymath Ortensio Lando, see Paul F. Grendler, *Critics of the Italian World, 1530-1560*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969. Despite the largely ironic nature of this work, Lando gestures to an interesting phenomenon, namely the rise of Ariosto above the other writers of narrative poems in *ottava rima*.

<sup>2</sup> Giraldi's position is largely Ciceronian in character. See his Latin letter on imitation to his teacher Calcagnini, in JoAnn DellaNeva, ed. (2007). *Ciceronian Controversies*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. Summarizing Giraldi's position in the introduction to that work, JoAnn Della Neva writes, "Cinzio immediately reveals his alliance with Cortesi and Bembo against the likes of Poliziano and Pico. Like Cortesi and Bembo, Cinzio asserts the necessity of imitation and chastises Poliziano for his apparent anti-imitative stance" (pg. xxvi).

logue, reading aloud from Bernardino Tomitano's treatise on vernacular composition, all break into laughter upon hearing particular stylistic mannerisms.

At roughly the same time, Bernardo Tasso writes several letters lamenting the fact that he is unable to adhere to his artistic convictions with the composition of vernacular epic. Rather than compose in *verso sciolto*, Bernardo must instead write his new poem, the *Amadigi*, in the manner of chivalric romance. In contrast to the *Canace* debate, where criticisms of the tragedy have little material effect on Speroni, Bernardo must cede to the demands of his patron, Ferrante Sanseverino. It is clear that Sanseverino is not on the same "intellectual" level as Bernardo, who attempts to outline the theoretical reasons for using blank verse. Regardless, Sanseverino—as well as others—asks Bernardo to make use of a "popular" verse form, *ottava rima*.

This metrical scheme did not appear at any moment in the metrical discussions of the 1530s, and Bernardo's letter appears to be the first attempt to incorporate it into the paradigm of *gravitas* seen previously. Thus in the early 1540s, *ottava rima* quickly became one of the primary metrical forms available for "heroic" poetry. By 1548, even Luigi Alamanni, previously the promoter of *verso sciolto* for narrative works, would change his mind and write his own epic, *Girone il cortese* in *ottava rima*. Within six years, two intellectuals, the same Giraldis of the *Giudizio* and his student Giambattista Pigna, will publish two separate treatises promoting the excellence of chivalric romance, in particular Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*. Despite its prior absence in theoretical debate, *ottava rima* will not only emerge as a metrical form, but it will become the prevailing model for virtually all vernacular narrative poetry.

In order to understand developments in the continuing search for vernacular epic, it will therefore be necessary to understand the emergence of *ottava rima* in the 1540s. In that decade, as stated in the previous chapter, there are few traces of explicit discussion on epic or heroic poetry. Apart from Bernardo's letters, the only substantial document is an immense two-volume commentary on the *Orlando furioso* published in 1548-49 by a relatively unknown philosopher named Simone Fornari. As we shall see, this work offers an example of attempts on the part of an intellectual to "elevate" the relatively "popular" *Furioso*. Though he is not a poet himself, Fornari thus represents a complementary vector to Bernardo: rather than see Ariosto's poem as diametrically opposed to erudite speculation, he attempts to legitimize the work—and *ottava rima*—through such speculation. As a result of this legitimizing activity, the *Furioso* will begin to displace Petrarch, and even Dante, as the principal model for narrative poetry.

We will begin by summarizing recent research on the history of *ottava rima* in the sixteenth century. Of particular interest is the work on the relationship between oral culture, printing, and the large number of imitations of Ariosto. Within this context, we will then look at Fornari's "defense" of Ariosto. From there, we will return to Bernardo Tasso, focusing on the descriptions of his work on the *Amadigi* throughout the 1540s and 1550s. An analysis of Bernardo's continuing artistic struggles will further clarify the shifting literary landscape in which Ariosto has become the dominant point of reference. Finally, in this chapter, we will briefly look at three intellectuals in the 1550s who refuse to accept Ariosto as model: Girolamo Muzio, Matteo San Martino, and Francesco Patrizi. These three writers attempted in various ways to return to the metrical discussion of the 1530s. Although each advocates for one of the different metrical schemes seen previously, they are all forced to argue exclusively against the use of *ottava rima*.

#### 4.1 FROM "LIBRI DI BATTAGLIA" TO CANONIZATION

Despite its notable absence in early discussions of vernacular epic, *ottava rima* had been employed in long narrative poems since roughly the thirteenth century. The most notable example of early usage of this metrical scheme is Boccaccio, who claims, in his *Teseide*, to have been the inventor of the form.<sup>3</sup> The vast majority of poems were chivalric romances based on material adapted from French Arthurian or Carolingian story cycles.<sup>4</sup> Such stories were immensely popular across the entire Italian peninsula, and manuscript evidence of romances exists from Sicily to Piedmont to the Veneto region. In fact, due to the vast geographical diffusion of these works, a corresponding variety of languages and dialects emerges well into the fifteenth and even sixteenth centuries.<sup>5</sup>

The authors of these romances are also largely anonymous, and it appears that they were frequently memorized by various street or court singers. Indeed, these works were primarily a form of public or semi-public entertainment, meaning that they were sung or

3 Most sixteenth century discussions of the *ottava* indicate Boccaccio as the father of the metrical scheme. There remains, however, a long-standing *vexata quaestio* about the true origin of the *ottava*, whether at Boccaccio's hands or as part of a larger cultural tradition either in Sicily or Venice. For a history of the history of *ottava rima*, see Floriana Calitti, *Fra lirica e narrativa: Storia dell'ottava rima nel Rinascimento*. Florence: Le Càriti editore, 2004.

4 For a general history and thematic overview of romances, see the fundamental studies Marina Beer, *Romanzi di cavalleria: Il "Furioso" e il romanzo del primo Cinquecento*. Rome: Bulzoni, 1987; Marco Praloran, *Narrare in ottave: metrica e stile dell'Innamorato*. Pisa: Nistri-Lischi, 1988; Maria Cristina Cabani, *Le forme del cantare epico-cavalleresco*. Lucca: M. Pacini Fazzi, 1988; and Calitti, *Fra lirica e narrativa* (2004).

5 See, for instance, Paul F. Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991, esp. pp. 289-99.



performed before groups of people, either in large spaces such as the piazza or in smaller areas like a court.<sup>6</sup> In other words, romances were popular in the very simple sense that a wide variety of people from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds enjoyed these works.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps it is due to the proximity to centers of power that singers and authors began to elevate the quality of these works in various manners. By the mid fifteenth century, poets such as Luigi Pulci and Matteo Maria Boiardo began to attach their name to their works. With this increased insistence on “authorizing” poems, a separate strand of romance began to emerge in the fifteenth century that is generally called “author romances” (“romanzi d’autore”). Such romances signal a shift in interest from a purely oral activity to written texts with more complex “literary” qualities.<sup>8</sup>

With the emergence of “author romances,” a more literary branch of romance begins to develop throughout the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, public, “anonymous” performances of poetry in *ottave* would continue to remain popular into the seventeenth century. Such performances were comprised of not only chivalric romance but also other forms of declamation such as recounting recent events, battles, or general news.<sup>9</sup> These performers, known as *cantimbanchi* or *cantimpanche*, were quite diffuse. The Veneto region in particular, that is, the area where many of the intellectuals in the 1530s were writing, had a long history of street singers who used *ottava rima*. In other words, despite the growing volume of printed works in the early sixteenth century, an oral culture persisted throughout the entire early modern period.

At the same time, printing also accelerated the further diffusion of romances in the early decades of the sixteenth century. In fact, both anonymous and authored romances enjoyed long-lasting success in print beginning in the late fifteenth century. Some of the very first incunables in Italy are, in fact, anonymous chivalric romances. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, while humanistically oriented printers such as Aldo Manuzio fo-

6 Recent research on early modern orality and performance has shed some light on these kinds of poems. See Luca Degl’Innocenti, Brian Richardson, Chiara Sbordoni, eds. *Interactions between Orality and Writing in Early Modern Italian Culture*. London: Routledge, 2016.

7 I am following Grendler’s more general (and more useful) conception of popularity as simply wide diffusion. See Paul F. Grendler, “Form and Function in Italian Renaissance Popular Books,” in *Renaissance Quarterly*, 46, 1993, pp. 451-85.

8 Cabani, *Le forme del cantare*, discusses the ways in which author romances imitate the oral qualities of the earlier anonymous works. Perhaps the most famous example of a written “literary” version of narrative *ottava rima* is Poliziano’s *Stanze per la giostra*.

9 For recent work, including further bibliography, see Luca Degl’Innocenti. “La voce dell’Altissimo. Il “Primo libro de’ Reali” dalla piazza alla tipografia.” In: *Boiardo, Ariosto e i libri di battaglia*, ed. by A. Canova, P. Vecchi Galli. Novara: Interlinea, 2007, pp. 185-204; Rosa Salzberg, “The Word on the Street: Street Performers and Devotional Texts in Renaissance Italy.” *The Italianist*, 34, 2014, pp. 336-48.

cused on the production of high-quality editions of classical works, other printers turned their attention to cheaply printed items of "entertainment."<sup>10</sup> These specific works were referred to by printers and publishers as "libri di battaglia," and they found a wide audience.<sup>11</sup> Records of a large number of impressions exist, as well as inventories which indicate the movement and sale of "libri di battaglia."

One example of such inventories can be found from the printer Gabriele Giolito de' Ferrari (ca. 1508 – 1578). Giolito was a prolific printer of specifically vernacular literature, including the works of several authors already seen, including the 1555 edition of Bernardo Tasso's lyric poetry, as well as the first edition of the *Amadigi* in 1560. Yet, he was interested in more than simply promoting "literary" works. Several of Giolito's book inventories from the mid 1530's list a large number of "libri di battaglia," suggesting both popularity and wide circulation.<sup>12</sup>

Such works were cheaply made, both in terms of the material composition and in the revision of the texts themselves. As Grendler points out, the typography was often "old-fashioned," using Roman—even Gothic—typefaces despite the rise of Italic. Small wood-block images were frequently used throughout the text, though they were frequently reused across works. Lastly, there was little editing of the texts themselves. Apart from frequent typographical errors, there was no attempt to standardize the language according to contemporary reforms. Indeed, there was often little to no punctuation throughout, leaving it up to the reader—or reciter—to interpret the poem's syntax. Despite the relatively poor quality of this format, it was apparently popular. In fact, this particular format can be seen in larger printing runs well into the late sixteenth, even early sixteenth, century.

Out of this mass of cheaply printed romances, a new, more deluxe format appeared in the 1530s following the rising popularity of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, whose final edition appeared in 1532. Giolito, the same printer of cheaply printed romance, developed a more expensive and more refined edition of the *Furioso*, which he published in 1536. Clearly targeting a more elite audience, this edition consisted of attractive typeface (Italic rather

<sup>10</sup> For a recent discussion of early cheap print, see Rosa Salzberg, *Ephemeral City: Cheap Print and Urban Culture in Renaissance Italy*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016.

<sup>11</sup> See Grendler, "Form and Function," for a discussion of printing popular literature. As an early modern example, Francesco Doni also lists a large number of similar works in his *Biblioteca* of 1550. This work is the first large-scale bibliography of contemporary vernacular literature. In attempting to account for as many different kinds of works possible, Doni does not differentiate between "high" and "low" forms, listing many chivalric romances.

<sup>12</sup> See Rosa Salzberg, "The Lyre, the Pen, and the Press: Performers and Print in Cinquecento Venice." In: *The Books of Venice*, ed. by C. Kallendorf, L. Pon. Venice: La Musa Talia, 2009, pp. 251-76.

than Gothic), elaborate images (scenes drawn from the *Furioso* rather than reusable and crude woodblocks), and expansive paratextual material. Indeed, while typical “libri di battaglia” began immediately with the text itself—often without a title page—, Giolito’s *Furioso* not only had an elaborate title page and frontispiece, but also prefatory letters and introductory stanzas for each canto. Despite the success of this deluxe, Ariostan romance, Giolito continued to print both the cheap and the deluxe edition throughout the rest of his career which lasted into the 1570s.<sup>13</sup>

As a result, early editors and printers helped further develop the “romanzo d’autore” as something belonging to a more literary culture beginning in the 1530s. Imitations of the form and format of “Ariostan romance” began to appear almost immediately. Not only did other publishers begin to follow Gioliti in his design of these new narrative poems, but poets began to see Ariosto as a worthy literary model to imitate. Indeed, by the 1530s and 1540s, there is a veritable proliferation of new works written in *ottava rima*. The vast amount of printing suggests a continued interest in these “lower quality” texts even into the seventeenth century. Moreover, it appears that there continued to be a large number of public performances of *ottava rima* throughout the century.

The form was so prevalent by the first half of the sixteenth century that it is surprising that *ottava rima* does not appear in any discussions of epic meter until the 1540s. The answer seems to be that “popularity,” that is, its appeal to the “popolo,” excludes this metrical scheme from consideration as a highly literary—that is, classicizing—poetic form.<sup>14</sup> Thus, despite the existence of a well-developed metrical scheme, used for the continuous narration of martial themes, found in both print and the piazza, the majority of erudite writers look elsewhere.<sup>15</sup>

This omission of *ottava rima* was unsustainable, however, as Ariosto’s *Orlando furioso* began to occupy a new position available for vernacular poets, that of a modern classic. And despite ignoring the presence of *ottava rima* well into the 1540s, writers experimenting with different forms were forced to come to terms with its vast popularity. Patrons and an expanding middle class (i.e. those who were purchasing a large number of books) began to exert greater pressure on the isolated intellectual class to legitimize the form.<sup>16</sup> The

13 For a description of Giolito’s two approaches to printing the *Furioso*, see Grendler, “Form and Function.”

14 This specific conception of *romanzi* as meant for the “popolo” and not the “dotti” becomes more explicit in the Tasso-Ariosto polemic.

15 It is worth noting, however, that the *stanza* was taken into consideration by various early sixteenth century writers as a lyrical form. Examples of *stanze* can be found in writers such as Bembo. See Calitti, *Tra lirica e narrativa*.

16 Editors had already been hard at work in this process of “canonization,” to use Javitch’s term. Dolce, for instance, had already begun to include statements about the *Furioso*’s allegorical content by the mid 1530s. See

first major attempt to legitimize a poem in *ottava rima* comes from Simone Fornari, who published a two-volume commentary on Ariosto's poem in 1548. An analysis of Fornari's declared intentions will further illuminate the emergence of *ottava rima*, specifically in Ariosto's use, as the sole metrical scheme for long-form narrative poetry.

#### 4.1.1 *Simone Fornari's Sposizione*

Fornari was born in Reggio di Calabria, most likely in the first decade of the sixteenth century.<sup>17</sup> After studying philosophy in Reggio, he travelled north to Padova, Ferrara, and Pisa to continue his studies. Apart from some poetry, it appears that Fornari published little else aside from his massive commentary on the *Orlando furioso*, entitled *Sposizione sopra l'Orlando furioso*, printed in two volumes in 1548 and 1549. Relying on the traditional form of commentaries on classical works, Fornari offers a comprehensive interpretation of Ariosto's poem. The first volume, dedicated to Cosimo de' Medici of Florence, contains the first biography of Ariosto, which includes information that Fornari gathered while visiting Ariosto's family in Ferrara. After the biography, there is a short "Apologia," in which Fornari responds to several anonymous detractors of the *Furioso*. Then comes the commentary itself, which exhaustively comments on every stanza of the poem, often line by line. The content of this interpretation is largely literal in character, in which Fornari clarifies grammatical issues, narrative points, or historical references. By contrast, the second volume, dedicated to Agostino Gonzaga, then archbishop of Reggio, turns to issues of morality and allegory. Closing the second volume is a letter to the readers—added sometime during the printing process—which responds explicitly to an attack on Ariosto made by the anonymous author of *La sferza de' scrittori antichi e moderni*, which would be published a year later, though its manuscript was in circulation.

In contrast to the previous authors from Trissino to Bernardo, Fornari is not especially interested in similar questions, such as defining poetic forms, planning for the future of vernacular literature, or proposing a theory of imitation. He seems largely uninterested in addressing issues related to the language question. Indeed he seems to take for granted that the vernacular is a language capable of addressing elevated or sophisticated cultural matters.

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Daniel Javitch (1991). *Proclaiming a Classic: The Canonization of Orlando Furioso*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

<sup>17</sup> For a biography of Fornari, see Rosario Contarino. "Fornari, Simone." In: *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, 49, 1997.

Nevertheless, there still seems to be a tension between the vernacular and classical languages, specifically in the inconsistent ways with which Fornari justifies his commentary on Ariosto. In the dedicatory letter to Cosimo de' Medici, Fornari offers an explanation for his sophisticated treatment of Ariosto's poem, emphasizing the massive popularity of the work:

Veggendo io [...] quanto l'Orlando Furioso di M. Lodovico Ariosto sia hoggi di tenuto in mano da qualunque persona, & come molti per difetto di dottrina, solamente all' harmonia dolce delle parole, & alle vaghe inventioni dell' historia intenti, quasi a scogli delle Sirene contenti si rimangano & appagati, & in niuna guisa più oltre volar non possano con l'ali dell'intelletto: ho presa questa fatica da molti forse poco bisognevole riputata, ma agli huomini mediocrementi dotti, se io non m'inganno, aggradevole e cara, cio è d'esplicar per tutta l'opra quei luoghi, che impedir pareva che dovessero il lettor men dotto & giudicioso.<sup>18</sup>

Immediately this description seems to confirm our hypothesis that poems in *ottava rima* were generally seen as "popular" in character, both in the sense of widely diffused and in the sense of participating in a distinct, potentially "lower" socio-cultural world. Fornari characterizes the values of these worlds as lying on a Horatian spectrum of *utile-dulci*: the popular world prefers pleasant sounds and clever plots, while the erudite one seeks intellectual satisfaction.

Later in the dedicatory letter, this same dichotomy between entertainment and intellectual edification reappears in Fornari's description of his own youthful experience with the *Furioso*. He claims that, as a youth, he was initially drawn to the "pleasantness" ("piacevolezza") and "beauty" ("vaghezza") of Ariosto's stories and language. Yet, as he grew older, he began to focus on more mature issues, such as the "greatness of the subject matter" ("altezza dei soggetti") and the "veiled morality" ("velata moralità").<sup>19</sup> Immediately we find the same opposition seen in earlier debates about the problems of using of rhyme (which produces "piacevolezza" or "dolcezza") in order to express epic substance (typically characterized as "grave" or "alto"). Fornari thus suggests that his commentary will help the readers of the *Furioso*, especially those who are less learned, to become more mature by attending to these "hidden" elements. Given the conventional nature of these images, Fornari's rhetoric rings rather hollow, especially when taken into consideration with authors such as Bernardo. Recall that in the prefaces to his lyrical poetry of the 1530s, Bernardo wanted to expand (and mature) the vernacular through lyrical experimentation.

<sup>18</sup> *La spositione di M. Simon Fornari da Rheggio sopra l'Orlando Furioso*. Florence: Lorenzo Torrentino, 1549, pg. 3.

<sup>19</sup> *Spositione*, pp. 13-14.

Fornari, however, seems to make a rather casual connection between the senses and the mind.

Fornari's use of this movement toward more substantial appreciation is belied by later statements concerning his decision to publish his commentary. A significantly different justification appears in the letter to the reader that closes the second volume. Here, he writes that he began his commentary on Ariosto in his youth as a kind of game: "Fu da me quest'opra humanissimi lettori concepita, & partorita quasi per giuoco nella prima mia adolescentia: & dopo ch'io mi diedi a qualche studio più grave, non pur da me non fu più oltre ne accresciuta, ne ammendata, ma ne ancho più vista."<sup>20</sup> In this account, it is the youth that dedicates his time to providing exegesis on the *Furioso*. The move to more substantial activity occurs not by changing perspective on Ariosto's poem, but by turning to more serious studies ("qualche studio più grave").

Fornari therefore suggests that there is something uncommon about providing exegesis for a modern vernacular work. For instance, in the same letter to his readers, he excuses possible typographical errors by commenting that the editor, a certain Arnolfo Arlenio, was busy working on more serious matters: "si trovò sì occupato in tante altre opre greche, & latine, & tutte dignissime, & di gran pregio, che alle mie humili, & basse, non ha potuto porre quella sua diligenza, & accuratezza, che nell'altre far suole."<sup>21</sup> In other words, there remains a clear hierarchy of values—in particular in terms of commentary—, wherein Greek and Latin works take precedence over vernacular exegesis. But why did Fornari actually print this youthful work? Why would he decide that a "game" begun in adolescence ought to be printed in two volumes?

It appears that Fornari ultimately chose to publish his work due to pressure from the Florentine court. He claims that, while he was studying philosophy in Pisa, he was asked by someone of importance: "Ritrovandomi adunque nella città di Pisa, dove io venni per dare opra alla Philosophia, mi fu imposto da persona, a cui niuna cosa possibile negar posso, ch'io dovessi questi commenti dare alle stampe."<sup>22</sup> Much like Bernardo, Fornari found himself unable to refuse the requests of this unnamed figure. Given that the work itself is dedicated to Cosimo de' Medici and his court, for whom Fornari offers an extended allegory related to the knights of the *Furioso*, it seems possible that Fornari was

<sup>20</sup> *La espositione sopra l'Orlando Furioso parte seconda*. Florence: Lorenzo Torrentino, pg. 335.

<sup>21</sup> *Espositione*, II, pg. 336.

<sup>22</sup> *Espositione*, II, pg. 335.

asked by a high-ranking Florentine.<sup>23</sup> As a result, the existence of the *Spositione* itself appears to be tied to a specific social world, much in the same way that Bernardo's composition of the *Amadigi* is determined by his relationship to Sanseverino. The direct influence of "patrons" on both poets and intellectual leads to the overlap of traditionally classical activities and forms with vernacular alternatives.

Fornari's work thus becomes, by virtue of its mere existence as erudite commentary, a means by which popular vernacular forms accrue intellectual capital. While he claims in the dedicatory letter to Cosimo that he will raise "middling" intellectuals to the level of true appreciation, his very framing of the problem of interpreting Ariosto—along with the simple existence of the commentary itself—both contribute to a concurrent process of placing the *Furioso* within a specific intellectual discourse. Fornari presupposes that the moral, intellectual, substance in the *Furioso* requires exegesis in the form of an *expositio*. This form has a long tradition of commentaries stretching back into the Middle Ages and employed throughout the sixteenth century, exclusively for classical works. Works of Antiquity, as well as several "classical" vernacular works such as Dante and Petrarch, become more firmly entrenched in the early modern canon through their constant reproduction as sites of exegesis by the intellectual class. Thus Fornari is, in a sense, "performing" a style of classical commentary that automatically legitimizes the *Furioso*, producing the "aura" of intellectual activity that will elevate it into erudite culture.

#### 4.1.2 *The Elevation of the Popular*

Beyond the form of his work, Fornari's own claims also provide a more sustained attempt to legitimize forms of literary consumption that were previously ignored in the theoretical consideration of the 1530s. Indeed, Fornari wants to argue that certain social practices, such as public reading, are not indicators of lower quality, as seems to be commonly thought. Instead, he believes, widespread recitations suggest a certain affinity with classical authors.

In the letter to the reader in the second volume, printed in 1549, he responds to the anonymous author of *La sferza*, who finds that the *Furioso* is of poor quality specifically because common people enjoy reading and listening to it. Fornari responds first by claiming that, even if simpletons and plebeians ("gli sciocchi & plebei") enjoy Ariosto's work,

<sup>23</sup> For instance, in his letter to Cosimo, Fornari writes, "Et come fedel servo che veramente vi sono, & tratto da lontan paese dall'honorato grido del divin valore di V.E. de gli alti studi, che nell'academia Pisana fioriscono [...] queste mie fatiche sopra l'elegante, & dotto Ariosto vi consacro, & dedico." *Spositione*, I, pg. 13.

it is clear that the *Furioso* is held in the highest regard by intellectuals who truly grasp the poem: "manifestamente si vede che l'Ariosto è più da gli huomini intendenti, & illustri, che da gli sciocchi, & plebei tenuto in mano, & havuto caro."<sup>24</sup> Regardless of the veracity of this statement (that is, which "group" enjoys the poem most), Fornari's response suggests that Ariosto's work was widely read by the end of the 1540s. Moreover, the popularity of the *Furioso* cut across typical socio-cultural class distinctions.

Fornari then shifts his focus from the defending the type of public enjoying Ariosto to legitimizing the mode of enjoyment, namely listening to the *Furioso* being sung in the piazza. This issue arises when Fornari responds to the anonymous detractor's claim that Ariosto is better as a poet of the lyre than of the trumpet ("[l'autore della *Sferza* lo rimanda a sonar la lira più tosto che la tromba").<sup>25</sup> For Fornari, the fact that the *Furioso* is sung before a group of people is, in reality, a sign of its perfection:

Se in quel che dice che questi versi son atti alla lira, intende [...] che si cantano in panca; egli mostra male di sapere che questo è testimonio della perfettion di quelli: quando si vede che sono da color scielti, che non attendono altro, che a dilettevolmente trattenere il popolo.<sup>26</sup>

Oddly, though Fornari begins his *Spositione* justifying his commentary to Cosimo as a form of intellectual enlightenment, he has now shifted his argument to defend Ariosto on account of the pleasurable entertainment that the *Furioso* affords. The initial separation between deceptively enticing language and moral substance appears to collapse now that Fornari wants to use popularity as an index of quality.

Fornari further associates the poet with the orator, who—according to Quintilian—must focus his energies on pleasing the crowd:

Ne è da dire per cio che al vulgo piacciono, che essi sieno leggieri, & di poco momento: Conciosia che 'l poeta non meno che l'oratore è artefice nato a dilettere. Et si come quella maniera del dire secondo Quintiliano è acconcia & lodevole, ch'all'orrechie popolari maggiormente s'accomoda: così ancho si potrà dire del poema.<sup>27</sup>

We are far removed from statements such as those of Giraldi, who divides "natural" language into popular and erudite, the latter of which requires a more judicious ear. Fornari's singular position that "popular taste" guarantees praise will find very few supporters in later defenses of the *Furioso*. In fact, it is precisely due to this aspect of popular entertainment that later authors, in particular Francesco Bolognetti, will largely condemn chivalric

<sup>24</sup> *Espositione*, II, pg. 338.

<sup>25</sup> *Espositione*, II, pg. 341.

<sup>26</sup> *Espositione*, II, pg. 341.

<sup>27</sup> *Espositione*, II, pg. 341.



romance. As we shall see in the next chapter, the class distinctions that seem to collapse in Fornari's defense will reappear in later attempts to distance vernacular romance from classical epic. Moreover, by the time of the polemic over Tasso's *Liberata* in the 1580s, the separation between the public of romance (who only seek entertainment) and that of epic (who search for moral and intellectual edification) will become totalizing.<sup>28</sup>

Fornari continues to defend public performance as an acceptable mode of consumption for elevated literature by pointing to the examples of Homer and Virgil. Their works, he claims, were necessarily read publicly, much in the same way that the *Furioso* is recited in the piazza:

l'uno & l'altro poema di questi antichi [i.e. Virgilio e Homero] correvano al tempo loro, & tra le lor genti così per tutto, come hoggidì fa l'Orlando Furioso. Ma che a tempi nostri non si veggono se non nelle mani de litterati, questo avviene per la ignoranza della lingua, & ancho per la ragion de tempi, che essendo del tutto mutata da quella prima, molte cose non si potrebbero intendere, quantunque le voci note fussero tutte.<sup>29</sup>

According to Fornari, the immense historical distance that lies between Antiquity and modern times has changed the ways in which classical works are consumed. Originally, he claims, they were read in much the same way as Ariosto's poem, but now they are studied only by the "litterati" due to the obscurity of the language and original context. As a result, the monopoly imposed on the study of classical literature appears to be artificially constructed by a specific class of people.

Fornari also cites the example of Sophocles, whose tragedies were destined to entertain not only Pericles and the intelligentsia of Greece, but the entire population who went to the theater.<sup>30</sup> He also makes a crucial point that the audience, regardless of intellectual sophistication, would have immediately understood the wit and profound ideas of Sophocles' works ("[il popolo] [...] ogni detto quantunque arguto, & di sententie gravido raccoglieva con meravigliosa prestezza").<sup>31</sup> According to Fornari, this same wit is only

<sup>28</sup> A clear example of this class distinction can be found in Orazio Lombardelli's defense of Tasso's poem, *Discorso intorno a' contrasti, che si fanno sopra la Gerusalemme Liberata*. Ferrara, 1586: "Che questo poema non possa esser' inteso dall'universale, è verissimo, ma che importa? se fusse inteso da tutti quei, che san leggere; sarebbe del novero dell'opere di quegli scrittori, non havuti per poeti, i cui scritti son chiamata dal Volgo libri di battaglie, e da' letterati Romanzi, questo dunque non può recar pregiudizio alcuno al poema; perché sarà letto da' letterati, e da' personaggi illustri, come anco da' religiosi, nelle case de' quali saria vergogna, che si trovassero quegli altri libri, come dir Buovo d'Antona, Danese Ugieri, l'Ancroia, e simili. Orazio dice, che è meglio piacere a pochi lettori, che alla moltitudine ignorante. [...] Non importerà dunque, che i Fornai lo portin per le piazze, per passar, la state, l'ore affannose" (pp. 115-16).

<sup>29</sup> *Espositione*, II, pp. 341-42.

<sup>30</sup> "Scrivea le sue Tragedie Sophocle non per dilettere Pericle & gli altri acuti ingegni della Grecia, ma accio si rappresentassero in scena a tutto il popolo." *Espositione*, II, pg. 342.

<sup>31</sup> *Espositione*, II, pg. 342.

understood by contemporary intellectuals through great effort ("hoggidì con gran fatica da dotti huomini sono intese").<sup>32</sup> The difficulty of classical works is thus not an indicator of intellectual sophistication, but rather of the historical gap, which has produced an ignorance of languages and contemporary allusions.

Fornari's defense of public recitation thus implies a critique of contemporary intellectuals, specifically their claim to the works of Antiquity. For Fornari, these intellectuals assume that classical works were naturally more erudite, when, in reality, they were as "popular" as Ariosto's poem. Ultimately, although he does not make any explicit statements about expanding the vernacular, Fornari does offer a unique historical view that positions itself against contemporary values that would establish a hierarchy of literatures, which would place classical letters as innately more sophisticated than vernacular works. Instead, he offers a more horizontal view of different epochs, where the consumption of literary works is remarkably similar, despite the differences in languages and customs.

Fornari thus offers a historically-grounded approach to the problem of legitimizing Ariosto's poem in order to place it on the same level as the works of Antiquity. Four main components constitute his position. First, there is the simple "performative" aspect of his commentary, which offers an exhaustive interpretation of the poem in the manner of classical treatises. Second, he claims—and then demonstrates—that there exists a more profound moral and allegorical sense in the *Furioso*. Put another way, the poem warrants as much sustained intellectual activity as a classical work. Third, Fornari defends popular modes of consumption, such as public recitation, by suggesting that popularity is not a sign of diminished quality. Lastly, he offers a radically different historical perspective that challenges the idea that classical literature is inherently better, when, in reality, the people of Antiquity engaged in largely similar social practices.

As a result, not only does Fornari "elevate" Ariosto, but, in a sense, he also "lowers" classical literature, as the works of Virgil, Homer, and Sophocles could now be seen as popular. This historical vision diverges quite substantially from a humanist, or neo-classical, ideology that views Antiquity as a perfect or ideal epoch that produced socially and intellectually distinct kinds of literature and thinking. Instead, Fornari proposes a relativist, potentially more "democratic," conception of literature in general, that sees the great Greek and Latin authors as participating in broader societal practices. By extension, vernacular literature is therefore also developing in a similar manner. As a result, the *Furioso* functions as a modern equivalent to the works of Homer and Virgil. Yet rather than

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<sup>32</sup> *Espositione*, II, pg. 342.

merely imply that Ariosto seems to be a vernacular epic poet, Fornari also engages in a brief theoretical discussion in which he makes the claim explicitly.

#### 4.1.3 *Lodovico Ariosto: First Epic Poet?*

Preceding the main commentary in the first volume, Fornari includes an *Apologia breve*, which contains a theoretical defense of Ariosto against certain, unnamed detractors. This “mini” treatise defends Ariosto’s poem primarily according to Aristotelian themes. By implication, Fornari’s unnamed opponents seem to be those intellectuals who have begun to employ the recently rediscovered *Poetics* in their own discussions of poetry. Indeed, as theoretical support, he refers explicitly to the commentaries (“gli eruditissimi commentari”) of Francesco Robortello (“l’eloquente M. Francesco Robortelli”), recently published in 1548.<sup>33</sup> As a result, while the overall content of the rest of Fornari’s commentary is largely concerned with explicating the *Furioso*, his *Apologia* claims Ariosto as a specifically epic poet who adheres to Aristotelian principles.

The majority of this *Apologia* is dedicated to familiar Aristotelian topics: the unity of action and protagonist; the status of episodes; the distinctions between poets and historians, as well as between truth and verisimilitude.<sup>34</sup> Yet following a discussion of these conventional narrative problems, Fornari turns to the problems of language and verse form. As with all of the previous authors, these issues present particular difficulties, largely due to the lack of theoretical scaffolding in the *Poetics* itself.

Fornari begins discussing the language of the *Furioso* by referring to the Aristotelian concepts touched upon by Speroni: namely the use of foreign languages and metaphors and the need for a metrical form that is “turgid and stable.” While Speroni will largely focus on the use of languages and metaphors as a means of linguistic innovation, Fornari attempts to show that Ariosto, in reality, closely follows these precepts.

In order to introduce these concepts, Fornari begins with the criticism that Ariosto’s poem contains words that are not necessarily “Tuscan” in nature: “Notano ancho il nostro poeta come colui, che non usa sempre nel suo dire parole Thoscane, ma spesso ponga mano ne vocaboli forastieri, & alieni della lingua Thoscana.”<sup>35</sup> Fornari responds by referring to both the theoretical authority of Aristotle and the practice of Petrarch. Fornari

<sup>33</sup> *Spositione*, I, pg. 33.

<sup>34</sup> The most comprehensive description of debates about these topics in the sixteenth century can be found in Bernard Weinberg (1961). *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>35</sup> *Spositione*, I, pp. 43-44.

writes that—following Aristotle—heroic poetry may use a “variety of languages” (“varietà delle lingue”).<sup>36</sup> As a result, it is clear that Fornari views Ariosto as necessarily writing within the literary form of “heroic poetry.” Nevertheless, he also claims that Petrarch relied on words drawn from other languages, specifically Provençal and Spanish: “[nel Petrarca] si veggono non solamente vocaboli, che della natia thoscana favella non sono, ma molti, che ne ancho sono Italiana, anzi Provenzali e Spagnuoli.”<sup>37</sup> Fornari thus anticipates two potential critiques against Ariosto’s language: first, those made by new proponents of Aristotelian poetic theory; second, those made by more traditional supporters of a highly restrictive model of (specifically Petrarchan) imitation. Fornari’s attempt to take into account both arguments suggests that the Aristotelian camp has not yet become as rigid as it will be later in the sixteenth century. Regardless, Fornari does not elaborate further on the issue.

Regarding the issue of meter, Fornari turns to Aristotle’s claim in the *Poetics* that “heroic verse” should not be mixed:

Et se ben pare, che Aristotile lodi il verso heroico come atto, & accommodato all’epopeia per cagion che esso non misto ma gonfio & stabilissimo fusse; diremo noi ancho, che l’ottava rima pur sempre è continuata con un medesimo ordine, in quanto che una stanza non è dall’altra nel procedere delle rime diversa.<sup>38</sup>

Fornari alludes to the same section from the *Poetics* earlier noted by Speroni in his discussion of epic meter; however, while Speroni was relying on Maggi’s Latin translation for the phrasing “turgid and stable,” Fornari refers to epic meter as “inflated” (“gonfio”) and “stable.” Due to the use of the word “gonfio,” instead of a more direct translation of the Latin *turgidus*, it is most likely that Fornari is relying on the recently published vernacular translation of the *Poetics* by Bernardo Segni (1549). Indeed, Segni translates this section as, “il verso Heroico infra tutti gli altri ha lo stabile, & il gonfiato: onde nasce, che e’ riceve attamente la varietà delle lingue, & le Metafore.”<sup>39</sup>

In fact, in the letter to the reader at the end of the second volume, Fornari virtually cites Segni’s translation verbatim:

Et la esperienza stessa fece apparire, che il verso Heroico fusse a tal sorte di Poema [i.e. magnifico] conveniente [...] Et la ragione è, che *il verso Heroico infra*

<sup>36</sup> “Aristotile ancho approva molto nell’heroico la varietà delle lingue” (44).

<sup>37</sup> *Spositione*, I, pg. 44.

<sup>38</sup> *Spositione*, I, pg. 45.

<sup>39</sup> Cited from *Rettorica, et poetica d’Aristotile tradotte di Greco in lingua vulgare fiorentina da Bernardo Segni*. Florence: Lorenzo Torrentino, 1551, pg. 200. It is worth noting that the printer for Segni’s translation is the same as Fornari’s commentary.

*tutti gli altri ha lo stabile, & il gonfiato; onde nasce, che e' riceve attamente la varietà delle lingue, & le Metafore.*<sup>40</sup>

Fornari, much like Speroni, does not attempt to unpack Aristotle's cryptic statement on the quality of epic meter. Regardless, it is clear that, for Fornari, the *Furioso* is now to be considered an epic poem ("epopeia"). Although he never explicitly states this point, it is clear that the goal of Fornari's project is not only to legitimize intellectually a "popular" work, but also to make the very specific case for Ariosto's status as a modern epic poet.

As a consequence, Fornari offers a response to the problem formulated by Daniello in his *Della poetica* in 1536. While Daniello believes that there is no model for vernacular epic poetry, despite the existence of the *Furioso*, Fornari has resolved the problem. But what about the extensive discussion of epic meter?

Oddly enough, Fornari makes no mention of previous debates over various metrical possibilities. Instead, he makes one brief comment on the use of *ottava rima*. According to Fornari, *terza rima* seems to be the best option for narrative poetry, as is seen in Dante and Petrarch; however, Ariosto's work, has proven to be the best model:

Quanto alla ragion della rima, che a molti non piace, i direi, che quantunque paia, che la terza rima più s'acconvenisse, che l'ottava a questo soggetto grande & heroico, come si vede haver fatto il Dante, & il Petrarca: pur l'ottava non è men capevole, & atta accio fare, che la terza, & se ben non vi sia stato per l'addietro, chi in essa havesse scritto così magnificamente, basta assai, che 'l nostro poeta col proprio esempio il dimostrasse.<sup>41</sup>

For Fornari, there are only two options for writing an epic poem: *terza rima* and *ottava rima*. The primary concern is whether or not the metrical scheme is "capevole," namely that it is "spacious" enough for narrative movement. Rhyme is taken for granted, and there seems to be no issue in its use. In fact, the closing rhyme in the final couplet of an octave is valued because it allows for the closure of the stanza's *sentenza*, presumably a benefit over *terza rima*, which must continue moving forward.<sup>42</sup>

As a result, Fornari's statement on epic meter does not fit within the larger discourse that we have seen. The closest similar position might be that of Giraldi, who prefers *terza rima*, although he too discusses the use of other forms, such as blank verse. In Fornari, however, there is no mention of *verso sciolto*, nor of any of the other metrical schemes put forward by debates in the 1530s. Instead, the notion of "narrative continuation" seems now to be largely subsumed under the indeterminate notion of "spaciousness." At the

<sup>40</sup> *Spositione*, II, pg. 340. Emphasis mine.

<sup>41</sup> *Spositione*, I, pg. 44.

<sup>42</sup> "[S]i vede, che le rime tre volte si rispondono, fuor che ne' duo ultimi versi, i quali vengono con quelle rime propinque a conchiudere & se stessi, & la stanza, & universalmente la sentenza anchora" (pg. 45).

same time, the question of gravity has disappeared completely in favor of a somewhat vague “gonfiezza,” which seems primarily a question of using metaphors and foreign languages. Fornari does seem aware of the attractiveness of the form, as evidenced by his discussion of “piacevolezza” in the dedicatory letter. Yet his response is merely to suggest the existence of more substantial moral and allegorical levels, rather than take into consideration more suitably “serious” or “elevated” poetic forms.

Though his discussion of language and meter is relatively unsophisticated, especially in terms of previous discussions, Fornari’s real importance lies in his awareness and discussion of the social life of poetry. As a result of his *Spositione*, the *Furioso*, which is already largely popular, becomes a site of widespread intellectual scrutiny and poetic imitation. Following Fornari’s “defense” of Ariosto, the *ottava rima* will rapidly become the *de facto* form for writing long form narrative poetry. Ariosto himself will also continue to be identified specifically as a vernacular “epic poet,” thereby providing a model for future writers. Yet this rising popularity did not diminish a certain dissatisfaction with this metrical form, in particular among more classicizing intellectuals and poets. Let us therefore return to Bernardo Tasso and his constant grappling with the issue of the social pressures and desire for more classical inflected poetry.

#### 4.2 BERNARDO TASSO AGAINST MODERN TASTE

As we have seen, Bernardo Tasso began his poetic career in the 1520s experimenting with classical forms in the vernacular, some of which he first published starting in 1531. After travelling south to Naples to join the court of Ferrante Sanseverino in 1532, he took on new diplomatic and secretarial duties, along with new requests for more ambitious forms of poetry. It is within this domain of Spanish-controlled courts that he is first asked to translate the material of a new cycle of romances, the Spanish tales of Amadís de Gaula, into Italian. Yet, despite his initial plan to compose this new poem in *verso sciolto*—considered by others and by himself to be the appropriate metrical scheme—he is asked to take up the more popular Italian *ottava rima*. Ultimately, Bernardo would labor on this poem for almost two decades, finally printing it as *Amadigi* in 1560. By looking at latter statements about the creation of this poem, we can begin to identify a continuing tension

between Bernardo's desire to develop a truly epic poem and the necessity of adapting to a rapidly homogenizing modern literary culture.<sup>43</sup>

#### 4.2.1 *Failure at Court*

A clear example of the tension between Bernardo's artistic inclination and social necessity is found in a document from his son, Torquato Tasso, published sixteen years after his father's death. In 1586, while imprisoned in the Hospital of Sant'Anna in Ferrara, Torquato printed an *Apologia*, defending both his own epic, *Gerusalemme liberata* (1581), as well as his father's *Amadigi*, against a critique printed by the Accademia della Crusca in 1584. Torquato's defense is largely a point-by-point response to the Crusca's various criticisms of the quality of both poems, which includes not only narrative issues but also linguistic concerns.

Yet when he comes to Bernardo's work, rather than simply rebut the Crusca, Torquato begins by describing his father's relative social status. He emphasizes Bernardo's chosen profession, that of courtier rather than poet, a position which forced his father to make artistic choices against his own convictions:

mio padre [...] fece professione di cortegiano, non di poeta; e le sue proprie lodi furono quelle che egli meritava in corte: l'altre degli studi sono state accidentali, e ricercate da lui dopo la sodisfazione dei padroni che egli serviva, a i quali principalmente cercava di compiacere.<sup>44</sup>

Such a distinction between courtier and poet is perhaps more useful for understanding the ways in which Torquato saw himself in relation to his father. Yet this description also affords further insight into Bernardo's status of dependence and the constraints put upon his poetic license by his social position.<sup>45</sup> In order to clarify further the differences between these two "professions," Torquato narrates a specific incident during the production of the *Amadigi* that convinced Bernardo to modify his poem to be more acceptable at court. He begins by emphasizing Bernardo's credentials as a specifically Aristotelian thinker:

<sup>43</sup> For a description of Bernardo's composition of the *Amadigi*, see Williamson, *Bernardo Tasso*. For a specific study on the movement from epic to romance and back to epic with Bernardo's later poem, *Floridante*, see Rosanna Morace, "'Com' edra o vite implica': Note sul *Floridante* di Bernardo Tasso," in *Studi tassiani*, 2004, pp 51-86.

<sup>44</sup> Torquato Tasso, *Apologia in difesa della Gerusalemme liberata*. Biblioteca italiana, 2003. Web. April 2017.

<sup>45</sup> Torquato's description of Bernardo's life also lines up well with the latter's own letters about the initial period of composition of the *Amadigi*: "Sappiate, dunque, ch'essendo mio padre nella Corte di Spagna per servizio del principe di Salerno suo padrone, fu persuaso da i principali di quella Corte a ridurre in poema l'istoria favolosa dell'*Amadigi*." See *Apologia*, Biblioteca italiana.

Si come colui che ottimamente intendeva l'arte poetica, e quella particolarmente insegnataci da Aristotele, deliberò di far poema d'una sola azione. [...] Questo fu il disegno, del quale alcun maestro dell'arte no 'l poteva far miglior, né più bello. Ma finalmente, per non perder il nome di buon cortigiano, non si curò di ritener a forza quello d'ottima poeta; e udite come.<sup>46</sup>

According to Tasso, Bernardo's Aristotelian understanding of the poetic art derives from a conception of epic as primarily a matter of narrative unity ("una sola azione"). It is unclear to what extent Bernardo himself saw his theory of poetry as especially beholden to the *Poetics*. Indeed, as his letters in the early 1540s make clear, Bernardo began to write the *Amadigi* without explicitly considering the rules of Aristotle. Instead, he was following the conventional discourse on epic poetry that had developed in the 1530s, which was mainly focused on the rhetorical problem of finding a form suitable to epic subject matter.

Yet, in Tasso's account, Bernardo was forced to change his poem not because he was a good Aristotelian, but rather because his audience did not enjoy poetry constructed around narrative unity. Torquato underlines this point by recounting the moment that Bernardo first read a draft of his poem to an audience in the court of Sanseverino:

Leggeva alcuni suoi canti al principe suo padrone; e quando egli cominciò a leggere, erano le camere piene di gentiluomini ascoltatori; ma nel fine, tutti erano spariti.<sup>47</sup>

Bernardo's first foray into a public reading of his poetry thus ends with an empty chamber. For Torquato, Bernardo realized that Aristotelian "unity of action" was, in itself, not pleasing ("da la qual cosa egli prese argomento che l'unità dell'azione fosse poco dilettevole per sua natura").<sup>48</sup> Apparently Bernardo's original "unified" plot was uninteresting to the point of boring the other courtiers. Tasso seems to imply that Bernardo's audience would have preferred a more entertaining story such as Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, with its multiple branch plot lines. Yet Torquato is also quick to emphasize that Bernardo's artistic abilities were not in question ("non per difetto d'arte che egli avesse: perciò che egli l'aveva trattata in modo che l'arte non poteva riprendersi: e di questo non s'ingannava punto").<sup>49</sup> Instead, Tasso suggests, the type of narrative that he employed—a classicizing Aristotelian narrative—was not suitable for the tastes of his larger court audience.

This anecdote raises questions about the (semi-)public recitation of the poem. How much of the poem did Bernardo recite? How complete was the poem? And, perhaps, more importantly for our investigation, was Bernardo reciting the poem as he originally

<sup>46</sup> *Apologia*, Biblioteca italiana.

<sup>47</sup> *Apologia*, Biblioteca italiana.

<sup>48</sup> *Apologia*, Biblioteca italiana.

<sup>49</sup> *Apologia*, Biblioteca italiana.



envisioned it in *verso sciolto*? We know that Bernardo began his compositional process by outlining the plot—together with things like epithets and metaphors—before crafting the verse.<sup>50</sup> It is also plausible that he had already composed an early draft in *verso sciolto*, which he presented to Sanseverino and Luigi D’Avila, considering that both of them ask him to compose in “Stanze.” In any event, it seems doubtful, or at least unlikely, that the sole reason for Bernardo’s unpopularity should arise simply due to the unity of action, and not the form of the poetry itself. Though we lack further evidence from this event, it is possible to hypothesize that Bernardo’s failure to impress the court resulted from his use of blank verse, leading his patron to ask him to write in *ottave rime*.

Regardless of the real motives for which Bernardo changed the form of his poem, Torquato seems to hold Bernardo in low esteem due to his decision to change his poem in response to this criticism. In fact, Torquato further illustrates his view on the difference between a true poet and a courtier when he states that Bernardo should have followed the ancient example of Antimachus of Colophon, who lost a public poetry competition with his rival:

Ma forse [a Bernardo] sarebbe bastato quello che bastò prima ad Antimaco Colofonio, a cui Platone valeva per molti, se 'l principe non avesse aggiunto il suo commandamento a la commune persuasione: laonde convenne ubidire, ma co 'l cor mesto e con turbato ciglio.<sup>51</sup>

According to Plutarch, Plato—who had attended the competition—was Antimachus’ only listener who understood the vast erudition of his poetry. Plato consoled the poet by telling him, “it is the ignorant who suffer from their ignorance, just as the blind do from their blindness.”<sup>52</sup> Torquato seems to imply that perhaps it would have been best if Bernardo had not changed his work, leaving it to later intellectuals to praise his theoretical sophistication, despite disapproval by his contemporaries. Yet, as Torquato claims, Bernardo decided to follow his patron’s wishes with a furrowed brow, changing his work for the worse.

Torquato’s account of Bernardo’s history helps bring into relief the complex set of competing pressures facing poets in the middle of composing a lengthy and complex work.

<sup>50</sup> Recall his letter to Sperone: “ho tutta disposta l’opera: e non pur disposta, ma appoggiate l’imitazioni, le comparazioni, le metafore, e gli altri ornamenti ai luoghi loro. Or comincio a distenderlo in prosa, accioché, a guisa d’esempio, e di modello di tutta la fabrica, mi possa servire.” *Delle lettere di M. Bernardo Tasso ... dal Anton-Federigo Seghezzi*. Padua: Giuseppe Comino, 2 vols, 1733, I, pg. 198.

<sup>51</sup> *Apologia*, Biblioteca italiana.

<sup>52</sup> See Plutarch, *Life of Lysander*, 18, in Plutarch, *Lives, Volume IV: Alcibiades and Coriolanus. Lysander and Sulla*. Trans. Bernadotte Perrin. Loeb Classical Library 80. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916. For a description of the views of Antimachus of Colophon in Antiquity, in particular as a severe epic poet with a turgid style, see D.W.T.C. Vessey, “The Reputation of Antimachus of Colophon,” in *Hermes*, 99, 1971, pp. 1-10.

The story of Bernardo's failed public reading suggests that, for Bernard, it is more than simply a question of ceding to his patron's request. Rather, Bernardo himself also experienced first hand the force of "common preference" ("commune persuasione"), which rejected his attempts at producing a properly classical form of poetry. Unlike in the case of Sperone Speroni, Bernardo cannot simply compose and print a classicizing work, despite possible opposition from other writers with competing sensibilities. Indeed, whereas Speroni enjoys a relatively autonomous social position in Padua, where he can engage in polemics with other intellectuals such as Giraldi, Bernardo's livelihood depends entirely on the approval—and stipend—of Sanseverino. As a result, he must abandon to a certain extent his earlier position as a classicizing poet developing new methods for the reproduction of classical forms.

#### 4.2.2 *Dissatisfaction Among Intellectuals*

With Bernardo, we continually find evidence of a turning away from an "intellectual" position in favor of more "popular" forms. This same movement appears in another account of his writing process, the preface to the first 1560 printing of the *Amadigi* by Lodovico Dolce. A Venetian polymath and the editor of Bernardo's poem, Dolce offers a useful evaluation of the relationship of the work to an ideal audience, one which complements Torquato's later account of Bernardo's time at the Spanish court. Dolce writes that the intellectual elite—who are dedicated to the study of Antiquity—will most likely not enjoy Bernardo's poem:

alcuni, dati del tutto allo studio delle Greche, e delle Latine lettere, non pur comendano, ma riprendono questa nuova, e vaghissima, & dilettevolissima maniera di Poesia; & ogn'altra, che non sia disposta secondo l'arte d'Aristotele, & ad imitatione di Virgilio, e d'Homero; ne vogliono che così fatti poemi siano amessi per Heroici, ne per buoni.<sup>53</sup>

For Dolce, the *Amadigi* is more aesthetically pleasing ("vaghissima, & dilettevolissima") than dependent on classical, specifically Aristotelian models ("che non sia disposta secondo l'arte d'Aristotele"). While Torquato describes Bernardo's moving away from overly abstract theorization in order to appease the court, Dolce suggests that Bernardo's poem may have ultimately alienated him from the more rigid theorists of classical imitation.

According to Dolce, Bernardo produced such an effective and pleasing style because he was well aware of contemporary tastes, which tended to avoid strict imitations of Homer

53 *L'Amadigi del S. Bernardo Tasso*. Venice: Fabio and Agostino Zoppini Fratelli, 1581, c. \*2r.

and Virgil.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, if Bernardo had really followed in the footsteps of Homer and Virgil, “non sarebbe forse letto da alcuno, o peraventura da pochi, non ricevendo il nostro tempo, ne la nostra lingua quelle forme e maniere di scrivere, che furono usate da loro.”<sup>55</sup> In other words, narrative unity is not the only issue. At stake is a particular form of language that closely imitates classical structures without sacrificing the reader’s enjoyment.

Dolce further explains the creation of this “nuova Poesia” by outlining the stages of composition of the *Amadigi*. As Torquato will do later, Dolce claims that Bernardo began by imitating Virgil and Homer “secondo le leggi di Aristotele.” Nevertheless, he says, Bernardo also realized that a purely classical imitation was not particularly pleasing, ultimately finding himself wavering between two options: that of the more popular Ariosto and that of Luigi Alamanni, whose *Girone il cortese*—printed in 1548-49—found little success.

Dapoi vedendo, tutto che di farlo vago, e piacevole si fosse affaticato, che non dilettaua; e veduto che non dilettaua parimente il Giron cortese dell’Alamanni, che si era dato a quella imitatione; e, che d’altra parte l’Ariosto, che se n’era dilungato, andava per le mani di ciascuno con lode e grido universale, mutò con miglior giudicio consiglio, e diede al suo Amadigi quella forma, che vedete al presente.<sup>56</sup>

Bernardo, realizing that the goal of poetry should tend towards delight rather than slavish imitation, reworked his poem:

leggendo questo Poema vi sarà lecito di vedere, parimente il medesimo fine, che è il dilettaue: intento principalissimo del Poeta. Percioché, quantunque un soggetto da se stesso sia diletteuole; se la testura, che è il modo di spiegarlo, non aggradisce alle orecchie di chi legge, come potrà egli partorir questo effetto?<sup>57</sup>

In Dolce’s view, Bernardo is not simply avoiding the rules of Aristotle on a whim, but rather reacting to the larger failures of Alamanni’s epic poem. The popularity of Ariosto is not the only coordinate for determining current tastes, but also the failure of other, more “classicizing” epic poems.

Rather than situate Bernardo relative to either a strictly Aristotelian position or to a strict imitation of Ariosto, Dolce instead offers a description of Bernardo’s specific style, where we find a condensed version of some of the earlier discussions of epic poetry that we have already seen:

54 Dolce writes about changing tastes: “si come i tempi introducono nuovi costumi, e le varietà delle lingue diverse forme di favellare apportano: così pare, che ragionevolmente si ricerchi, che si faccia nello scrivere.” *Amadigi*, c. \*2r.

55 *Amadigi*, c. \*2r.

56 *Amadigi*, cc. \*2v-\*3r.

57 *Amadigi*, c. \*3v.

Appresso trovando già per lunga esperienza la nostra lingua capevole d'ogni ornamento, ha voluto in ciò arricchir la sua opera di epiteti, di traslati, d'hyperboli, e di molte figure, che abbelliscono il Poema, e lo fanno magnifico e grande, [...] seguendo il suo Genio, il quale gli ha dato uno stile florido, vago, e più ornato di quanti hanno scritto fin qui. Nella lingua è sceltissimo, & accurato: non però tanto, che si sia voluto restringere superstitiosamente nelle parole del Petrarca, sapendo, che al Poeta Heroico non conviene la delicatezza delle voci, che appartiene al Lirico. Il verso è puro, alto, e leggiadro: ne si parte giamai dalla gravità; la qual serba più e meno, secondo la qualità de' soggetti.<sup>58</sup>

Dolce emphasizes certain rhetorical figures, such as metaphors and hyperbole, which produce a “magnificent” (“magnifico”) poem. According to Dolce, such figures belong to a florid and ornamental style, which previous vernacular poets had failed to produce (“più ornato di quanto hanno scritto fin qui”)—suggesting as well as certain stylistic superiority over even Ariosto. In fact, even Petrarch’s language, limited to the realm of lyrical styles, was unable to escape a certain lexical “delicacy” (“delicatezza”), thereby failing to provide a proper model for the production of heroic *gravitas*.

This argument largely follows the same logic of the discussions seen previously, as evidenced especially by the claim that Bernardo’s style follows the “quality of the subject matter” (“secondo la qualità de’ soggetti”). According to this view, vernacular epic poetry, following the expectations established by classical literature, belongs to a particular aesthetic domain, that of *gravitas* and elevation; however, the typical model used for vernacular imitation, namely Petrarchan lyric, fails to provide the expressive means for reaching such a domain. Unlike the earlier formulations of this argument, Dolce is not interested in metrical choices. Instead, Dolce claims that Bernardo was able to evoke an epic aesthetic register without departing from the essential requirement of poetry, that of “pleasure” (“dilettare”), which derives from following an Ariostan model built necessarily on *ottava rima*. The problem of choosing between *verso sciolto*, *terza rima*, or even more radical experimentation is entirely absent from Dolce’s consideration.

Instead, Dolce believes that Bernardo attended little to the issue of meter, focusing instead on the creation of an impressive style.<sup>59</sup> He offers no elaborate theories of the proper imitation of classical hexameter.

<sup>58</sup> *Amadigi*, c. \*3v.

<sup>59</sup> Dolce even specifies the moments where Bernardo’s ability to produce epic *gravitas* comes out most clearly, namely in battles: “in discriver le battaglie e gli abbattimenti de’ Cavalieri, de’ Giganti, e de’ Mostri, che v’intervengono, è altresì incomparabile, dimostrando, quanto importi l’essersi trovato ne’ fatti tra l’horribil suono delle trombe, e dei tamburi.” *Amadigi*, c. \*4r.

Based on Dolce's description, it is clear that the example of Alamanni's strict imitation of Virgil and Homer has provided a justification for poets to turn away from an overly erudite approach to composition. At the same time, it seems that the conventional vernacular model of Petrarch is still unsatisfactory, and the poet of the *Canzoniere* remains an example of a limited lyrical range rather than possible epic severity. In other words, by the time of Dolce's preface in 1560, it is no longer merely a question of abstract speculation on epic meter, nor even a matter of choosing between "erudite" and "popular" poetry. Instead, Bernardo becomes the example of a poet who has accepted the current situation, where one particular form—chivalric romance—is more widely accepted; however, he is also attempting to expand the aesthetic range of that particular form through the creation of a new style.

#### 4.2.3 *The Search for a Third Way*

The story of Bernardo's composition of the *Amadigi* offers an example of a poet dissatisfied with both an overly classicizing erudition and the pressure to conform entirely to the model of Ariosto. Bernardo's primary concern is understanding the limits of modern taste. Statements concerning his frustration with contemporary sensibilities and practices appear throughout his letters to other writers during the composition of the *Amadigi*.

As early as his letter to Speroni in 1543, Bernardo already claims that he must find a way to incorporate classicizing elements into a more popular form. Before he has even seen Alamanni's *Girone*, Bernardo writes that his plan is to combine Ariostan form with classical epic content: "Nella qualità, e maniera del verso sarò simile all'Ariosto: nell'ordine, e nelle altre cose alla disposizione appartenenti, Virgilio, e Omero, quanto basteranno le forze mie, procurerò d'imitare."<sup>60</sup> His early decision to choose an Ariostan model for the "maniera del verso" perhaps further confirms the hypothesis—contrary to Torquato's later claim—that Bernardo's early failure at court was more a matter of employing an uninteresting manner of expression than proper Aristotelian narrative unity.

In another letter to Benedetto Varchi, from 1547, Bernardo writes again of his decision to change the form of the *Amadigi* in order to follow more closely Ariosto. Yet, in Bernardo's estimation, Ariosto's genius lies primarily in his own awareness of modern sensibilities, according to which he adjusted his work:

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<sup>60</sup> *Lettere*, I, pg. 169.

accorgendomi poi che [l'*Amadigi*] non aveva quella verità che suol dilettere, e che da questo secolo, già assuefatto alla forma de' Romanzi, si desidera, conobbi che l'Ariosto non a caso, né per non saper l'arte (come alcuni dicono) ma con grandissimo giudicio accomodandosi al gusto del presente secolo, aveva così disposta l'Opera sua.<sup>61</sup>

In other words, Bernardo disagrees with criticisms concerning Ariosto's skill and judgment. Indeed, for Bernardo, the best aspect to imitate of Ariosto's work is his attention to the present time ("il presente secolo"). He suggests that it is only through an understanding of taste that a poet can compose an enjoyable poem, that is, one that produces delight ("dilettare").<sup>62</sup>

Bernardo is perhaps responding to certain intellectuals who were then striving to produce more rigorously classical works. Indeed, after lamenting the lack of enjoyment in his poem, Bernardo immediately mentions that he has recently seen a manuscript copy of Alamanni's *Girone*, which has convinced him to abandon the purely classical path: "avendo l'esempio del Giron Cortese innanzi gli occhi; mi rivolsi a questo cammino, il quale trovo più vago, e dilettevole."<sup>63</sup> Ultimately, for Bernardo, the issue of epic poetry has become largely that of producing a poem that is "dilettevole," that is, enjoyable for its audience.

Bernardo thus offers the view of a poet in the 1540s struggling to understand the proper method for imitating classical works. Indeed, with the failure of Alamanni—as well as Trissino—, poets like Bernardo begin to re-evaluate the processes debated in the previous decades. Yet, in later letters, it is clear that Bernardo continues to struggle to find an alternative to moving entirely in the direction of Ariosto and "contemporary taste" ("il gusto del secolo").

Indeed, in a later letter from 1556 to Giovan Battista Giraldi, the same critic of Speroni's *Canace*, Bernardo describes his work as different not only from Alamanni's style of epic, but also from Ariostan romance. He begins by complimenting Giraldi for his recent treatise on chivalric romance, *Discorso sopra il comporre dei romanzi* (1554). Although we will examine this work more thoroughly in the next chapter, it is important to emphasize that Giraldi makes a theoretical distinction between truly classical epic—following the precepts of Aristotle and the examples of Homer and Virgil—and modern chivalric romance. Bernardo himself recognizes this difference, thanking Giraldi for having corrected certain

<sup>61</sup> *Lettere*, I, pg. 147. Williamson dates this letter 1547. See Edward Williamson (1951). *Bernardo Tasso*. Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, pg. 106.

<sup>62</sup> It is also possible that Bernardo's claim that his poem was not enjoyable is a reference to the same moment at court recounted by Torquato in his *Apologia*.

<sup>63</sup> *Lettere*, I, pg. 147.

unnamed thinkers who believed that Ariosto was an “epic poeta” (“Poeta Epico”), rather than an artist following his own rules (“osservatore delle leggi sue”).<sup>64</sup> Although he does not identify any particular writers, Bernardo may have in mind intellectuals such as For-nari, who does not attempt to distinguish the heroic poetry of Antiquity from that of the vernacular.

Bernardo further claims that although Ariosto sings of heroic feats and knights, he decided to follow a path different from that of imitating Virgil and Homer. Instead, Bernardo writes, Ariosto chose to emulate classical rhapsodes, whose public performances better pleased a public audience of listeners. As a result, Bernardo claims that Ariosto’s work *should* be considered a “heroic” (“con verità Eroica si potrà nominare”), but not “epic.”<sup>65</sup> As a result, in Bernardo’s estimation, true vernacular epic poetry remains to be written.

Yet, according to Bernardo, more recent attempts to produce a “true” classical epic have failed, and will continue to fail, due to a lack of awareness about contemporary taste. He returns to the example of Alamanni, who had recently died in 1556. Alamanni’s *Avarchide*, an even more classicizing epic poem, was then in circulation, though it would not be published until 1570. Several of Bernardo’s correspondents had already seen a manuscript copy of the poem, and he laments that, according to them, the poem will enjoy little success among modern readers:

Già sono assuefatti gli orecchi, e ’l gusto degli uomini del nostro secolo a questo novo modo di poesia di sorte, che niuna altra maniera di scrivere gli può dilettere: e se ne vedrà in breve l’esperienza nell’Avarchide del dottissimo M. Luigi Alemanni, che tosto verrà in luce: nella composizione della quale quello eruditissimo ingegno ha osservato in tal modo, e sì minutamente l’artificio che usò Omero nell’Iliade, che nulla vi si può desiderare. Nulladimeno per relazione d’alcune persone di molto giudizio che l’hanno e vista, e considerata, non diletterà.<sup>66</sup>

According to Bernardo, despite his vast erudition (“dottissimo ... eruditissimo”) and despite his extreme attention to imitating the details of Homer, Alamanni has not produced

<sup>64</sup> Bernardo thanks Giraldi for clearing away “la nebbia di que’ giudici i quali, non distinguendo la qualità de’ Poemi, lo riprendevano come Poeta Epico, e non osservatore delle leggi sue; della qual riprensione certo sarebbe stato degno, se la diversità del Poema, e l’intenzione del Poeta non l’avesse iscusato, e difese le ragioni sue.” *Lettere*, I, pg. 193.

<sup>65</sup> “Ma se questi tali [i.e. i giudici che riprendevano Ariosto come Poeta Epico] considereranno che questa sorte di Poesia forse potrebbe esser quella istessa ch’anticamente presso de’ Greci, e de’ Latini fu usata da coloro ch’alle tavole de’ gran Principi cantavano i magnanimi fatti degli Eroi; e che l’Ariosto nella disposizione dell’opera sua piuttosto l’artificio di questi Rapsodi, che quello d’Omero, nè di Virgilio, si propose d’imitare; sperando peravventura, più per questo sentiero, che per lo loro, camminando, di poter il mondo dilettere; giudicheranno che non a caso, (come molti dicono) ma con molta prudenza, e molto giudizio abbia tessuta l’opera sua: la qual con ragione, e con verità Eroica si potrà nominare; poiché in essa e di fatti eroici, e di cavalieri illustri, e d’Eroi si tratta continuamente, e si ragiona.” *Lettere*, I, pg. 193.

<sup>66</sup> *Lettere*, I, pp. 194-95.

an enjoyable poem. Contemporary readers and listeners, he says, are so accustomed to the form of romance that no other type of literature will be acceptable.

For Bernardo, the problem of producing a more classicizing form of vernacular epic now consists primarily in a writer's attention to the production of "delight" in the audience:

Ma, come si sia, io ho con tutte le forze in questa opera mia atteso alla delectazione; parendomi che sia più necessaria, e più difficile al poeta di asseguire: perché come si vede per esperienza, molti scrittori giovane, e pochi diletmano.<sup>67</sup>

Bernardo emphasizes, perhaps surprisingly, that the true difficulty in composing such works is found in simply making them pleasant to read or hear. In other words, vast erudition and detailed imitation of classical works are no guarantee of either poetic ability or lasting success. Much like in Fornari's earlier statement concerning popularity, Bernardo appears to be criticizing a class of certain intellectuals, whose obsession with classical literature has put them out of touch with contemporary culture.

Bernardo's statement concerning the dearth of enjoyable writers also suggests a general sense of disappointment concerning the state of vernacular epic by the mid 1550s. The few self-described epic poems that already emerged, namely Trissino's *Italia liberata* and Alamanni's *Girone*, were largely failures. Despite the two decades of work put into it, the *Italia* would never be reprinted in the 16th century after its first edition in 1547—whereas Trissino's *Sofonisba* would have over 20 editions.<sup>68</sup> The *Girone* was reprinted once in 1549 in Venice, after its initial 1548 printing in Paris.<sup>69</sup>

Bernardo's emphasis lies everywhere on the difficulty of adhering to a loosely classical form, while also remaining within the realm of "modern taste." Ariosto, he believes, had understood the best way to adapt his art to contemporary issues, thereby providing the central model for future heroic poetry. Nevertheless, Bernardo still wishes to produce a new form of poetry, one which splits the difference between Ariostan imitation and rigidly classical precepts. The issue then becomes one of experimentation within an acceptable framework.<sup>70</sup> As Dolce's preface suggests, one avenue of experimentation is not with meter itself, but with more specific stylistic choices, such as diction, syntax, and various rhetorical figures. In other words, by 1560, *ottava rima* has become so entrenched in

<sup>67</sup> *Lettere*, I, pg. 195.

<sup>68</sup> Basic information taken from a search on the *edit16* database of sixteenth century printed works.

<sup>69</sup> *Girone il cortese di Luigi Alamanni al christianissimo et inuittissimo re Arrigo secondo*. Venice: Comin da Trino di Monferrato, 1549.

<sup>70</sup> This statement of navigating two pressures is important not only for understanding Bernardo, but also Torquato's early chivalric romance *Rinaldo* (1562), where the poet—at eighteen years old—would describe his own work as an attempt to navigate the extreme classical rules of the Aristotelians and the limited vision of the Ariostans.



popular taste that it is impossible to write a “heroic” narrative in any other form. Poets must then shift their attention away from considering the strict reproduction of hexameter to imitating, or reproducing, different aspects of classical epic.

Looking at Bernardo’s example, we see the scales shifting from erudite classicizing experimentation toward more successful modern vernacular forms. The former will become embodied not only in Alamanni, but also in Trissino, whose own poems were published in the same period and who also met with an enormous lack of success. Thus, by the end of the 1540s, the poetic forms theorized and developed in the preceding decades ultimately resulted in abject failure.<sup>71</sup> At the same time, Ariosto’s poem was not only becoming extremely popular in itself, but was producing its own literary industry. Part of this emergence of a “modern classic” is the production of the first classical commentary applied to a modern work, Simone Fornari’s two volume exegesis. Other writers in the 1550s and early 1560s will find themselves in the peculiar position of needing to reproduce classical epic, while also seeing the failure of Trissino and Alamanni. The most notable examples, are Giraldi, Pigna, and Bolognetti. Yet before we turn to their attempts to navigate this new literary reality, let us look briefly at another contemporary response to the rise of Ariosto: attempts by contemporary intellectuals to reintroduce the metrical question in response to *ottava rima*.

#### 4.3 REMAINS OF THE METRICAL QUESTION

By the mid 1550s, there seem to be few acceptable alternatives to *ottava rima* for poets attempting to write “heroic” poetry. Yet speculation on the issue of meter would continue to surface at different moments. For example, Benedetto Varchi gave several lectures on vernacular heroic verse before the Accademia Fiorentina in 1553, where he lists various metrical possibilities, though largely in an encyclopedia manner, rather than as a prescriptive statement.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, Varchi presents a summary of all attempts to create heroic verse in the past twenty years, from *terza rima* to *ottava* to *verso sciolto*, as well as the experimentations of Claudio Tolomei, which Varchi generally ridicules. Varchi, in the section

<sup>71</sup> Trissino’s and Alamanni’s works were not frequently published, and we find scattered statements of ridicule. Torquato, for instance, will later condemn Trissino claiming that he is “mentovato da pochi, letto da pochissimi, prezzato quasi da nissuno [...] muto nel teatro del mondo.” See Torquato Tasso and Luigi Poma (1964). *Discorsi dell’arte poetica e del poema eroico*. Bari: Laterza.

<sup>72</sup> The title of this lecture is *Lezione terza, del verso eroico toscano*. In its original—and all later—printings, it is prefaced with the comment: “Letta da lui pubblicamente nell’Accademia Fiorentina, l’ultima domenica di dicembre, l’anno MDLIII”. The entire lecture can be found in *Opere di Benedetto Varchi*, Trieste: Lloyd Austriaco, 1859, vol. II, pp. 709-720.

describing the *ottava*, praises Boccaccio as the founder of the verse form. After him, however, many imitators debased the metrical scheme with their unpoetic and ungrammatical usage: "Dietro costui [Boccaccio], ma dopo lungo tempo e spazio seguirono molti, i quali col medesimo verso le battaglie e altri avvenimenti scrissero [...] ma tanto lontani non solo dall'artificio de' poeti, ma dalle regole de' grammatici."<sup>73</sup> Varchi thus offers further insight into the earlier absence of *ottava rima* in metrical discussion. It seems most likely that it is not until the intellectual legitimization of Ariosto—mainly by writers such as Fornari—that the metrical scheme is taken into consideration.

Within this group of uncultivated writers, Varchi includes all the authors of chivalric romance of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, including more well-known writers such as Pulci and Boiardo. According to Varchi, the next author to reach the summit of poetry with *ottava rima*—that is, as distinct from more plebeian forms of culture—is Poliziano, "essendo dotto e giudizioso, lasciate in gran parte le parole e i modi della plebe."<sup>74</sup> For Varchi, Poliziano had raised vernacular literature so much higher than his predecessors that, if he had actually completed his work in *Le stanze per la giostra*, it would have eliminated any need to debate the necessary form for heroic poetry: "S'alzò tanto da tutti gli altri, che dinnanzi a lui furono, che se gli altri che dopo lui vennero, si fossero tanto da lui alzati, non ci accadrebbe ora quale fosse lo stile eroico disputare."<sup>75</sup> Thus, for Varchi, the best poet of the *ottava* remains Ariosto, who has yet to find an equal.<sup>76</sup>

With Varchi, there *does* exist a clear distinction between lower forms of culture and more elevated works of literature. In fact, in his judgment, *ottava rima* is probably the best choice for heroic verse despite the fact that it is also used by poets who improvise their material:

Ed io per me, se bene ancora nell'ottave rime si desidera alcuna cosa, non le giudico punto nè meno degne, nè manco nobili che le terze: anzi agli orecchi miei paiono e più grandi e più sonanti. Di maniera che quando bene fossero più naturali e più agevoli, che l'altre, come mostrano quelli, che improvvisamente dicono, non per questo a giudicio nostro sarebbero da dovere essere dispreziate.<sup>77</sup>

For Varchi, *ottava rima* offers the most impressive sound, despite the fact that it is also the "easiest" and "most natural" form available. Such a sound is shared by two cultures,

<sup>73</sup> *Opere*, II, pg. 712.

<sup>74</sup> *Opere*, II, pg. 712.

<sup>75</sup> *Opere*, II, pg. 718.

<sup>76</sup> "Ariosto per giudizio comune ha infin qui nel suo Furioso ottenuto la palma; dietro il quale ha il grido M. Luigi Alamanni nel suo Girone, benchè noi [...] siamo di diverso parere." See *Opere*, II, pg. 718.

<sup>77</sup> *Opere*, II, pg. 718.

that of the improvisers and that of the poets. Yet, like Fornari, Varchi does not see this as necessarily problematic (“non [...] da dovere essere dispregiate”). The matter becomes one of taking a form enjoyed by many and refining it into a more “noble” and “worthy” literary work.

The varieties of writers theorizing the possibilities of poetry has also begun to expand, such that new interventions on poetic matters do not necessarily overlap with the earlier, more insular intellectual discourse. As we have seen, other actors are also beginning to exert a noticeable influence on the production of poetry, not just the patrons at the court, but also figures more interested in “practical matters”: publishers, printers, and editors. Thus the earlier discussions about elevating the vernacular and potential forms to represent classical literature have run aground on the simple fact that poetry is not merely an elitist enterprise; there are, in fact, multiple spheres of literary consumption, and now those spheres are beginning to overlap in new ways, thanks in large part to the pressures of patronage. The broader appeal of the Ariostan *ottava* has led to its acceptance even among intellectuals, who might prefer other options for narrative poems.

As a result, there seems to be little room to experiment with form, not only because of the increased focus on standardizing the vernacular, but also of the previous experiments that failed to find an audience. Yet despite a near unanimous acceptance of the Ariostan *ottava* in practice, many writers continued to consider alternatives. Indeed, we will examine three authors who find that, by the 1550s, the matter of vernacular epic meter is still up for debate. These authors are Girolamo Muzio, Matteo San Martino, and Francesco Patrizi, who argue for *verso sciolto*, *terza rima*, and metrical experimentation, respectively, in works printed throughout the 1550s.

#### 4.3.1 *Girolamo Muzio – verso sciolto*

Girolamo Muzio (1496-1576) was a distinguished man of both arms and letters who crossed paths with—and befriended—a large number of important intellectuals, poets, and political figures of the sixteenth century.<sup>78</sup> A staunch defender of Catholicism against the rising Protestant movement, he was also well-known for his expertise on duelling, honor, and chivalry. His views on poetry were largely derived from Trissino, although he was less interested in the highly erudite and elitist content of Trissino’s project. Rather,

<sup>78</sup> For Muzio’s biography, see Marco Faini. “Muzio, Girolamo.” *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, 77, 2012. Treccani. Web. April 2017

Muzio was a proponent of a masculine and severe form of literature, distinct from the pleasantries of traditional Italian verse. This conception of poetry can be found mainly in his three book *Arte poetica* (1551), a vernacular reworking of Horace's treatise, in which he sets forward the proper composition of all poetic genres.<sup>79</sup>

In the first book of his *Poetica*, Muzio offers a list of possible genres in the vernacular, noting that epic poetry has yet to appear. He states quite explicitly that previous vernacular poems singing of war are not to be taken seriously:

Nè infino ad hora a la tromba di Marte  
Post'ha la bocca alcun con pieno spirto.  
Et chiunque de' nostri al suon de l'arme  
Volto ha la mente parmi essere intento  
Al diletta le femine, & la plebe.<sup>80</sup>

Muzio does not discuss the problem of epic poetry here, nor what constitutes this other, more feminine and plebeian form. It is not difficult to imagine that, with the latter, he is referring to chivalric romance, whose popularity in the piazza and court seems to prevent it from truly "sounding the trumpet of Mars."

While the first two books are mainly an overview of vernacular poetry, including a description of a proper poetic education, the third book is dedicated almost entirely to the problem of epic. Muzio introduces the matter by discussing meter, specifically the fact that the vernacular lacks a metrical form that would allow the heroic poet to narrate at his leisure. The book begins with the simple opposition between the "innate freedom" of great subject matter, and the "circumscribed boundaries" of love poetry:

Chi stringer vuol la libertà natia  
De' gran soggetti in circoscritto giro,  
S'io non m'inganno, è fuor del buon cammino.  
Il cavalier, ch'amore armato in piazza  
Conduce per mostrare il suo valore  
A la sua bella donna a pari incontri,  
Ben è che sia rinchiuso entro le sbarre.  
Ma quel, che per la patria, & per la vita  
Rota la spada fra 'l nimico stuolo  
Vuole haver le campagne intorno aperte.<sup>81</sup>

Once again, Muzio relies on a description of the audience of this poetry. The poet who wishes to sing of love in the piazza will find himself instead imprisoned by that poetic

<sup>79</sup> All excerpts from this text are cited from *Rime diverse del Mutio Iustinopolitano*. Venice: Gabriel Giolito de' Ferrari e Fratelli, 1551.

<sup>80</sup> *Rime diverse*, c. 74r.

<sup>81</sup> *Rime diverse*, c. 86r.

form. On the other hand, true epic poetry—dedicated to the fatherland and vitality—requires a certain poetic freedom.

Muzio associates conventional vernacular lyrical forms with limitations, both in terms of theme and in terms of the compositional process. He returns to a familiar mode of characterization seen in the 1530s, in which the structure of rhyme imposes on the poet the necessity to conclude narrative movement with the sound of the verse:

Più son atti a la lira che a la tromba  
I ternarii, & le stanze: in quelli, e in queste  
Chiuder conviemmi in numerati versi  
La mia sentenza, & chiuderla conviemmi  
Nel fin del verso, o perdo ogni vaghezza.<sup>82</sup>

Thus the metrical schemes of both *terza* and *ottava rima* are naturally more appropriate for lyrical poetry than the trumpet of epic. Despite the conventional way of framing this issue, Muzio—like Bernardo before him—must now come to terms specifically with *ottava rima*. Most interestingly, he associates this form of versification with the sphere of lyric poetry: not only is it subsumed under the instrument of the lyre, but it is also the poetry of the piazza, meant to be sung to women and “plebeians.”

According to Muzio, the true epic poet should therefore make use of *verso sciolto* (“rime senza rime”). Echoing Trissino’s earlier concern about the reception of this form, Muzio also notes that those whose ears are not yet accustomed to other forms of singing will resist at first.<sup>83</sup> In fact, the issue becomes one of convincing his contemporaries that blank verse is a more mature form of poetry, one which does not merely satisfy the senses.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, even within the realm of lyric poetry, young poets prefer to compose sonnets and *capitoli* than more serious endeavors such as *canzoni*:

Troppo puote il costume; & tanto puote,  
Che natura non può contra ’l costume.  
Ma questo sente anchor chi in questa lingua  
Suol gir presso a capitoli, & Sonetti,  
E ’l fil de le canzoni non intende.<sup>85</sup>

In other words, in Muzio’s view, there seems to be a larger tendency in contemporary culture towards amorous lyrical poetry, rather than more serious forms.

<sup>82</sup> *Rime diverse*, cc. 86r-86v.

<sup>83</sup> “Et chi non v’ha l’orecchie in tutto nove | Altra lettura, altro cantar non vole.” *Rime diverse*, c. 86v.

<sup>84</sup> “Molti si son veduti molte volte | Ch’in su ’l giovenil fior nova vaghezza | Preso han d’oggetto; ch’a i lor sensi aggrada. | Nè men potrem veder chi da prim’anni | Col cor rivolto a giovenili studi | Di poeti, & d’amor, coi bianchi crini | Altro sentire, altro parlar non vuole.” *Rime diverse*, c. 87v.

<sup>85</sup> *Rime diverse*, cc. 87r-87v. It is worth noting that the *canzone* often appears as related to the epic, both in terms of meter and its ability to offer narrative in verse. Torquato Tasso will frequently make this connection, especially in his dialogue *La Cavaletta*. This line of investigation would be fruitful for a future project.

Throughout the rest of the book, Muzio continues to make the same distinction between these two kinds of poetry, sensuous and intellectual. Those who wish to write in blank verse must guard their ears from the “sweet deception” of rhyme.

Et se vorran dal lusinghevol suono  
 Ritirarsi alquanto, & a quel dolce inganno  
 Turar l'orecchie, aprendo i sensi interni  
 A la virtù, che ne le rime sciolte  
 L'alma sente caper, sia loro aperto.<sup>86</sup>

Muzio seems to insist so much on this distinction because, according to him, Greek and Latin poets were capable of using the same verse form to treat multiple kinds of subject matter with a variety of styles. Vernacular poetry, he believes, has doomed itself to a limited realm of poetic subjects due to this insistence on sweetness (“quel dolce inganno”).

Apart from *verso sciolto*, Muzio also outlines the components of epic style, repeating many of the same points that we have already seen. A new epic poet must employ an “elevated subject matter” (“suggetto altero”), “correct diction” (“parole scelte”), and verses which are “colorati di vezzosi fiori, | Da giudicio, & prudenza accompagnati.”<sup>87</sup> Due to the indeterminate quality of this description, these requirements appear to belong to a generic elevated style. Yet Muzio also incorporates the two elements of epic language hinted at in Aristotle's *Poetics* and already addressed by Speroni and Fornari. According to Muzio, an epic must also include strange words which are both “new” and “archaic” (“hor novelle, & hor antiche”), as well as metaphors (“tralate”). Indeed, Muzio finds metaphors to be crucial to the production of an epic style, though he does not elaborate further.<sup>88</sup>

The last fundamental component of the epic poet's language is that he employ a wide variety of styles, according to the situation. This approach is not particularly unique and can be seen in most of the authors under discussion. What is perhaps important to note is Muzio's insistence on the point of view of the reader:

Non sia del dir una sola sembianza,  
 Ma nova, & varia; hor dritto, & hor obliquo  
 Vuole esser il parlar. Dubitar vuolsi,  
 Negar, interrogar, chiamar altrui,  
 Dal lungo circoito hor stia sospeso  
 L'animo del lettor mirando al fine.

<sup>86</sup> *Rime diverse*, c. 87v.

<sup>87</sup> *Rime diverse*, c. 88v.

<sup>88</sup> In fact, he includes a brief statement about their necessity for the proper expression of a concept, though he does not go into any detail: “... è 'l lor uso | o necessario, o per esprimer meglio | Nostri concetti, o per solo ornamento.” *Rime diverse*, c. 89r.

Hor chiuda un verso intera una sentenza;  
 Hor co i punti, & col senso in suo si parta.<sup>89</sup>

While someone like Bembo discusses “variety” in terms of a simple aesthetic preference—one which seeks to eliminate satiety and boredom—, Muzio here focuses on the fact that the reader, when confronted with such a vast variety of poetic modes, remains uncertain about a narrative’s progress. That this uncertainty is a positive quality of poetry in Muzio’s estimation should come as a surprise. Most earlier discussions of *verso sciolto*, and of the need to narrate freely, do not attempt to make sense of the aesthetic response to such uneven movement.<sup>90</sup> Instead, writers are mainly concerned with combating the apparently pernicious temptations of rhyme. Of course, Muzio himself also immediately returns to this line of argument, but now with a more refined sense of the competing aesthetics of rhymed and unrhymed poetry. When Muzio reintroduces the problem of the sound of rhyme, he no longer merely sets the prettiness of sound against the severity of sense, but rather two kinds of sound symbolized by two different metaphors:

Chi col suon del suo fin cerca vaghezza,  
 La rima e la sentenza chiuda insieme,  
 E quanto può più formi i versi interi.  
 Ma s’alcun vuol con risonante tromba  
 Libero uscir a le campagne aperte,  
 Vada per questa via; ché questa è quella  
 Per cui camina ogni maggior poeta.<sup>91</sup>

Ultimately, Muzio advocates for a version of *verso sciolto* that differs in small but important ways from the conception set forward by earlier poets such as Alamanni and Trissino. Muzio is less interested in developing an elite caste of intellectuals who will determine the form of a highly erudite type of epic. Instead, he is more attuned to questions of literary consumption and the direct experience of poetry. Thus, he elaborates more clearly on issues of sound (the problem of the prettiness of rhyme) and the aesthetic impact of the freer and more “masculine” form of *verso sciolto*.

#### 4.3.2 Matteo San Martino – terza rima

Matteo San Martino (1494-1556) was born in Piedmont, though spent much of his early life in Rome, where he befriended various interlocutors in the language debate, such as

<sup>89</sup> *Rime diverse*, c. 90v.

<sup>90</sup> This attention to the effect of an uneven and inconsistent experience of poetry will be much more developed by Torquato Tasso, who was, in reality, a student of Muzio’s in his teenage years.

<sup>91</sup> *Rime diverse*, c. 90v. This use of metaphors as a method for contrasting different kinds of poetry appears extensively in Torquato Tasso’s verse. For an analysis of his use of metaphors of poetic form, see the Appendix.

Bembo and Tolomei.<sup>92</sup> His interest in vernacular linguistic questions led him to compose a treatise on grammar, largely following Bembo's project of standardization, which was first published in 1555. Appended to the treatise, however, are two letters from San Martino to Tolomei, concerning the latter's positions on epic poetry as expressed in the letters to Cinuzzi which we saw earlier.<sup>93</sup>

San Martino begins his statement to Tolomei by mentioning his own attempts to compose an epic poem on Julius Caesar—now lost—in which he attempted to use every sort of rhyme scheme available, before settling on *terza rima*. He claims that he attempted to find the appropriate heroic meter by experimenting with several different possibilities:

fra i tanti tumulti bellici di questa patria posto essendomi a ricercar lo heroico stile di questo nostro italico idioma, dopo lo haver di ogni tessitura di rime e d'ogni metro di versi che imaginar mi potessi di compor provato (fra le quali tessiture due già ne hebbi da voi), mosso al fine sì per mio debil giuditio, come per la autorità di Dante e di Petrarca, alquanti anni già in terza rima gli amori e guerre di Giulio Cesare incominciai.<sup>94</sup>

San Martino's autobiographical description seems relatively similar to the trajectory of Antonio Brocardo in Speroni's dialogue on rhetoric. He even seems to partake of a similar "metrical alchemy," attempting to use two of Tolomei's own invented metrical patterns ("fra le quali tessiture due già ne hebbi da voi").<sup>95</sup> Ultimately, however, San Martino's position begins to coincide with the views of Bembo and Daniello, and *terza rima* becomes the only acceptable rhyme scheme for epic.

The novelty of San Martino's contribution, as opposed to the statements made by Daniello, lies in his defense of *terza rima* against both *verso sciolto* and the *ottava*. Thus, like Muzio, he offers an "updated" form of an older position. Against *verso sciolto*, he makes the point—by now familiar—that such a metrical scheme has no ability to regulate its

<sup>92</sup> For a brief, though not terribly elaborate, biography of San Martino, see *Storia della poesia in Piemonte*. Turin: Tipografia Chirio e Mina: 1841, vol. I, pg. 119.

<sup>93</sup> All citations come from *Le osservazioni grammaticali e poetiche della lingua italiana*. Rome: Valerio Dorico, e Luigi fratelli, 1555.

<sup>94</sup> *Osservazioni*, pg. 238. Such a statement also suggests that San Martino participated in the metrical discussions of the 1530s and 1540s in Rome. It is odd, however, that this letter is only printed for the first time in 1555. Given that Tolomei's letters were first printed in 1547, it is likely that San Martino had composed these letters earlier. Perhaps he was waiting for the publication of his treatise on grammar to include his thoughts on epic meter. In either case, his statements seem somewhat anachronistic, given that by 1555, chivalric romance had been generally accepted as the predominant form of poetic narrative.

<sup>95</sup> The form of these metrical schemes remains a mystery, yet this statement provides further evidence of Tolomei attempting to influence attempts to write epic poetry, although we no longer have any of his writings on the matter. In his letters to Cinuzzi, Tolomei does mention that he has written on epic poetry, but that text has not survived. As a result, this statement by San Martino seems like a particularly useful point of departure for thinking about the network of poets experimenting with epic meter in Rome in the 1530s and 1540s.



movement. According to San Martino, without rhymes, a verse hurries forward like an uncontrollable and excited horse.

E per che a quanto circa questo scrivete a parte a parte risponda, con voi a quello che de i versi sciolti giudicate essendomi ogni hor conformato, con pace degli honorati et dotti suoi auctori, parermi dico che in nessun modo lo heroico stile rappresentino, che ancor che con natural vena di gonfiato furor della musa sopra il comune uso trascendendo i versi snodino, pur quasi a superbo cavallo in corso che senza freno per ritenerlo stia ci rassomigliano.<sup>96</sup>

According to San Martino, *verso sciolto*, since it lacks a regular pattern of rhymes, tumbles forward without any restraint. Of interest is the fact that San Martino's criticism of blank verse is precisely that which Muzio praises. In other words, at stake here is the continued struggle between two competing literary tastes, which are frequently repeated and reasserted without explicitly addressing the possibility that such a form of poetry might simply be enjoyable for a certain group of people. Regardless, San Martino proceeds, repeating some of the points made by Tolomei himself in his letter, such as the notion that *verso sciolto* resembles prose:

Oltre che, non essendo da collegamento di rime o d'altro artificio concatenati, poco da la prosa differiscono, però che nel parlar quotidiano spesso si formano, secondo la Poetica d'Aristotele che ivi allegasti, di heroico stile per ciò inetti rendendosi.<sup>97</sup>

*Terza rima*, on the other hand, with its consistent structure and "harmonizzata consonantia" offers verses which are "di maggior gravità & più capaci di gravi sententie."<sup>98</sup>

The notion of *gravità*, dispersed throughout earlier statements on epic, returns in full force in San Martino's. In fact, he goes on to address *ottava rima*, which he rejects based on the familiar dichotomy of "dolcezza" vs. "gravità."

Hor quanto alla ottava rima, ancor che da voi non sia a tal questione citata, ne dirò quello che già ne dissi al signor marchese del Vasto, exhortandomi a tessere in essa la mia incominciata *Giuliade*, che al poetico variar dello Ariosto par che non poco si convenga, ma a grave, continuata historia si disdirebbe in ogni ottava rima pausa farvi, oltre che quanto più la sua doppia consonantia nel fine dolcezza apporta, tanto più quella scema di gravità, sì come che la lena del poetico furor senza pause suplir non potesse dove che per sua natura non men che martial tromba gonfiata exhalar si richiede, oltre che, ove i sensi suoi sempre sì in lungo ampliar bisognasse, troppo diffuso il poema ne restaria, oltre l'auttorità di Dante et Petrarca che il confermano.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>96</sup> *Osservazioni*, pp. 238-239.

<sup>97</sup> *Osservazioni*, pg. 239.

<sup>98</sup> *Osservazioni*, pg. 244.

<sup>99</sup> *Osservazioni*, pp. 244-245. It is worth noting that San Martino mentions a certain "Marchese del Vasto,"—that is Alfonso D'Avalos—as an interlocutor on metrical questions. D'Avalos was also closely connected with

Surprisingly, the only reason he seems to consider this particular metrical scheme is due to the suggestion by a powerful member of court, Alfonso D'Avalos. Regardless, his rejection of *ottava rima* falls along the lines we have seen thus far. There are three main points: first, the single unified action of epic requires a different sort of verse form than *ottava rima*, which is more appropriate for Ariosto's narrative variety (*poetico variar*).<sup>100</sup> In his view, a serious, continued story must not stop frequently, as is required by octaves.<sup>101</sup> Second, the rhyming couplet at the end of an octave produces "dolcezza," rather than "gravità." Lastly, this closure of meaning might not correspond to the epic poet's need to continue moving forward according to his "poetic fury" ("*poetico furor*").

San Martino's position closely follows positions in the earlier debate, such as Daniello's, advocating for the use of rhyme, specifically the avoidance of excessive sweetness and the need for unfettered narrative movement. Yet, he is required to update this view in order to address the emerging *ottava rima*. Ultimately, San Martino's case against the verse form is not particularly convincing.

#### 4.3.3 Francesco Patrizi – *nuovo verso heroico*

The last example of thinkers returning to metrical issues is Francesco Patrizi (1529-1597). Born in Greece, student at the University in Padua, Patrizi is perhaps best known for his radical project of attempting to topple Aristotelianism in Italy and replace it with a comprehensive Platonic philosophy.<sup>102</sup> His principal works are a series of polemical treatises and several "deche" on various topics, such as poetry, history, and metaphysics. He would also become one of Torquato Tasso's primary intellectual opponents in the 1580s concerning topics such as the proper definition of imitation. Before he had begun implementing his Platonic vision, he also wrote a short passage of an epic poem, entitled *L'Eridano*, first printed in 1557. The short poem is a mythological tale about the Po river,

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Girolamo Muzio, as well as certain literary salons, such as that of Vittoria Colonna, in the 1530s and 1540s. It seems to me that this connection is worth pursuing at a later time. Since D'Avalos died in 1546, this reference also suggests that San Martino had begun working on his poem a decade earlier, around the same time that Bernardo was struggling with the metrical form of his own *Amadigi*.

<sup>100</sup> This point seems somewhat similar to a position seen in Giraldi's discussion of romance, namely that the multiplicity of narratives and topics in Ariostan romance, understood as public entertainment, requires a stanza that allows the singer to pause frequently.

<sup>101</sup> This point seems to contradict somewhat San Martino's earlier condemnation of *verso sciolto*; however, it seems that he is making a distinction between a regular and stable, though freely moving, verse form like *terza rima*, and an irregular and prosaic form like *verso sciolto*.

<sup>102</sup> For Patrizi's biography, see Margherita Palumbo. "Patrizi, Francesco." *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, 81, 2014. Treccani. Web. April 2017.

his nymph daughter, and competition amongst various suitors for her hand in marriage—all of which leads to praise of the house of D'Este in Ferrara. The most peculiar aspect of the work is its metrical form, which was invented entirely by Patrizi. Indeed, at the conclusion of the poem, Patrizi included a short defense of his “nuovo verso heroico.”

Patrizi begins, as most of the other authors have done, by comparing the metrical forms of the vernacular with those of classical languages. His initial position, however, differs quite substantially from the other authors we have seen. Rather than take for granted that hendecasyllable is the equivalent of the classical hexameter, Patrizi asserts that, in reality, no corresponding verse line exists in the vernacular.

Nella lingua italiana non ha dubbio veruno che il luogo del giambo greco prese l'endecasillabo che si usa; così corre egli in su la lingua altrui senza essere sentito. Ma nel luogo dell'eroico non è ancora venuto in questa lingua verso alcuno che sia creduto meritamente occupar quel luogo.<sup>103</sup>

Rather than offering a true heroic meter, hendecasyllable is closest to natural, spoken rhythms, much like the Greek iamb. It is due to this proximity to the iamb that Patrizi praises Trissino for his use of *verso sciolto* in tragedy, but “in poema eroico egli l'usò fuori di suo luogo.”<sup>104</sup>

For Patrizi, all other various attempts to invent an epic verse form have failed, specifically Dante with *terza rima* (more appropriate for elegy) and Boccaccio with *ottava rima*. There is also the *sestina*, but both it and the *ottava* are more appropriate for other kinds of poetry, specifically epigrams. In other words, Patrizi considers all of the various attempts at vernacular narrative poetry as merely continuations of a lyrical tradition. Lastly, Patrizi cites Bernardo Tasso, who, with his earlier metrical experimentation had invented a middle way between the constraints of rhyme and the excessive freedom of *verso sciolto*, “fuggendo la rima per la dolcezza e per l'obbligo ch'altri n'ha e lo sciolto per la troppa libertà sua.”<sup>105</sup> Yet even Bernardo's verse falls short of true epic grandeur.

In contrast to all of these earlier forms, Patrizi claims that he will follow the path of Tolomei by inventing a new meter. He approaches the issue, however, through a lengthy consideration of the various manners in which a new verse form might be created, that is, by favoring either “rhythm” or “harmony”:

Avendo io adunque all'animo di formare nuovo verso il quale fosse ad imprimere le eroiche cose acconcio, considerai che egli era per poco necessario

<sup>103</sup> All citations are taken from Carducci, G. *La poesia barbara nei secoli XV e XVI*, Bologna: Nicola Zanichelli, 1881. Patrizi's short defense begins on pg. 443.

<sup>104</sup> *Poesia barbara*, pg. 443.

<sup>105</sup> *Poesia barbara*, pp. 443-444.

che io mi incaminassi per l'una delle due vie, o dell'armonia, o del tempo. E dopo lunga consulta io mi risolsi alla fine di prendere la via dell'armonia.<sup>106</sup>

According to Patrizi, Tolomei had erred in looking to invent a meter based on quantitative rhythm, rather than a rhythm produced by the stressed and unstressed syllables of the vernacular. Patrizi offers three reasons to support his decision not to attempt to reproduce an exact copy of hexameter: the vernacular is language based in song, people are too accustomed to hearing harmony, and the dactylic foot would sound ridiculous.

L'una perché mi pareva più scienzialmente fondare arte di nuovo verso, s'io la fondassi in cosa essenziale al canto e propria, che fondandola in cosa forestiera e comune a tutte operazioni. La seconda, ch'io m'avisava che non molto strano egli era per parere a gli orecchi usati al suono de' versi fondati in armonia, s'io facessi al mio porre i piedi ne' vestigi medesimi de gl' inalzamenti di quello, facendolo, sì come io mostrerò, un sol passo di più fare per arrivare al segno de gli eroici antichi. La terza cagione fu, che non parve a me che questa nostra lingua potesse patire di ricevere nel verso il suono del dattilo, col quale ella mostra portare una mortale nimistà, così n'ha ella pochi e così poca comodità di formarne. *Poesia barbara*, pg. 445.

Patrizi—more so than Tolomei—is thus attuned to the social history of the vernacular, which effectively produces a range of acceptable possible forms and which constrains further experimentation. The third point concerning dactyls leads Patrizi to theorize the need for a poetic rhythm that avoids leaving too many successive syllables unstressed. As a result, his solution to the problem is merely that of extending the length of a line while also guaranteeing certain accented positions throughout the verse. He ultimately ends up with a line of thirteen syllables, with required accented syllables in the middle of the line.

Patrizi also briefly addresses the question of rhyme, which is not acceptable in an epic poem, for the simple reason that it produces a “bond” between lines:

Le rime [...] non ho io voluto dare al verso mio per questa sola fortissima ragione, che lo spirito eroico non patisce legami per la sua grandezza, e le rime, obbligando altrui a posar il fiato in certi luoghi, non sono altro che legamenti dello spirito.<sup>107</sup>

Like Muzio, San Martino, and the majority of writers on meter, the issue is one of unfettered narrative movement. In Patrizi's case, he has taken the point a step further into the realm of performance and recitation: requiring a poet to rest on rhymed words is anathema to heroic “spirito”—which appears to take on the double meaning of both spirit and breath.

<sup>106</sup> *Poesia barbara*, pg. 444.

<sup>107</sup> *Poesia barbara*, pg. 450.

Let us take a look at an example of Patrizi's line. Here is an excerpt from the *Eridano* of a sea tempest, described in terms of battling winds:

Quando ecco l'aria, di terribil nembo oscuro  
 Tutti annegrarsi, e farsi buia notte 'l mondo  
 Di dense nubi: E i venti horribilmente armati  
 Di folgore e di tuoni, infra di lor fraterna  
 Mortale guerra incominciar; e gir ferendo  
 L'un l'altro: e d'atra rabbia per lo ciel muggiando.  
 Quindi da gli urti, e da le gran percosse horrende  
 Spinto Euro, e Noto, e Borea, rotolando in mare  
 Cader, e gli altri a gran fracasso perseguirgli.<sup>108</sup>

In terms of sound, it is difficult to measure the impact of the extra syllables, especially since Patrizi also uses other notable techniques to render the lines heavier and presumably more epic, for example an abundance of consonant clusters and a large number of the letters R and S.<sup>109</sup> Yet, it is also quite clear that Patrizi's approach is fundamentally different than that of most vernacular poets employing rhymed poetry. There are very few codified and cliché poetic phrases—especially of something like Petrarchan repetition and antithesis—and the narrative moves forward unceasingly, aided by frequent enjambement. However, the accusation that such a verse closely resembles prose would also carry some weight here. Unfortunately, there do not seem to be any extant responses to Patrizi's poem, nor did the work enjoy any further editorial success after its initial printing. But perhaps such deafening silence presents a clear enough statement about the reception of this "nuovo verso heroico."

These three authors offer us statements throughout the 1550s concerning the continuing problem of producing the first epic poem in the vernacular. The method of their interventions echoes earlier discussion, where a significant amount of time is spent untangling issues of rhyme, rhythm, and narrative movement. Aristotle's *Poetics* is still largely absent, since the issue remains one of linguistic implementation rather than larger narrative concerns. We do see his influence somewhat in Muzio's discussion of metaphors and foreign words, but he does not elaborate on these points. Ultimately, we find the continued insistence on using specific metrical schemes: *verso sciolto*, *terza rima*, or an entirely new option.

<sup>108</sup> *L'Eridano in nuovo verso heroico, di Francesco Patritio*. Ferrara: Francesco de Rossi da Valenza, 1557, c. Bir.

<sup>109</sup> For a useful discussion of these techniques, especially using Virgil as a model, see María José Vega Ramos, *El secreto artificio: qualitas sonorum, maronolatría y tradición pontaniana en la poética del renacimiento*, Madrid: Aguirre, 1992, in particular the chapter "La aspereza épica," pp. 243-282.

Yet these statements differ from those seen earlier in the century in that they are also explicitly concerned with the status of *ottava rima*. Rather than ignoring the form completely, they are now compelled to include it in their discussion. Muzio dismisses *ottava* as a sort of pure sensual entertainment for women and plebes; San Martino finds the octave structure too restrictive and its closing couplet too sweet; Patrizi feels that the octave should only exist as individual stanzas, in the form of an epigram, rather than as a connected series in a narrative. Let us turn now to two writers who accept *ottava rima* as the sole form of heroic poetry, yet who continue to wonder about new expressive possibilities.

In the next section we will therefore consider several theorists—and perhaps defenders—of chivalric romance, Giraldi and Pigna. Despite their open praise of the form, they both seek to produce epic poetry on their own. Lastly, we will look at one particular poet, Bolognetti, whose poem *Il Costante* appears to be the first attempt after the failures of Trissino and Alamanni, to create the first “true” epic poem in the vernacular.

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## 5.1 GIRALDI AND NARRATIVE TYPOLOGY

The previous chapter took into account the emergence of taste as one of the pressures that poets had to confront when composing an epic. As a result of shifting emphases, the question of meter seems to have been displaced to the fringes of the discussion. In lieu of the various metrical options debated in the 1530s, *ottava rima* becomes the primary metrical scheme for epic narrative due to the growing popularity of the *Orlando furioso*. In the following two chapters, we will look at responses to this discursive shift and to the emergence of Ariosto's poem as the fundamental model of imitation. The writers we will analyze all accept *ottava rima*, and specifically Ariostan romance, as the dominant form of heroic poetry; however, they do not consider this form to be a "true" epic that follows classical models.

We will look at three specific writers, Giambattista Giraldi Cinzio, Giambattista Pigna, and Francesco Bolognetti, who all view romance with increasing levels of scepticism. Despite acknowledging the popularity and importance of Ariosto, they continue to theorize the means by which a modern epic might be established. Giraldi (1504-1573) and Pigna (1529-1575), the focus of this chapter, attempt to recover epic by distinguishing between classical and modern variations, the latter of which must be mediated by popular taste for chivalric romance. Bolognetti (ca. 1510-1574), the subject of chapter 5, accepts the growing pressure to write in *ottava rima*, but feels that romance and Ariosto lie far from a true epic ideal. His vision of epic ultimately excludes much of the same audiences and popular tastes that have been informing poetic decisions in the mid-sixteenth century. In fact, with Bolognetti, the epic project becomes more decidedly elitist as a reaction to the proliferation of more "popular" forms.



5.1.1 *The Genre of Heroic Poetry*

In chapter 2, we explored Giralaldi's ideas on tragic meter and style in his *Giudizio*, a severe critique of Sperone Speroni's tragedy, *Canace*. Now we will turn to broader concerns about the styles of romance and epic. There are two main texts that present Giralaldi's conception of these two forms: his *Discorso intorno al comporre i Romanzi*, first printed in 1554 (though likely composed around 1548-49), and his letters to Bernardo Tasso on epic poetry, written between 1556-1557. The former presents a defense of modern chivalric romance, where—unlike Muzio, San Martino, and Patrizi—Giralaldi claims that the form is, following Aristotelian principles, properly “heroic” poetry. In reality, the very decision to label romance as heroic is the central component of his defense, as he is able to construct a larger category of poetry under which both modern romance and classical epic can co-exist.

It is from this important distinction that Giralaldi ultimately claims that, though Ariosto is a heroic poet, a truly “epic” work has yet to appear in the vernacular. Indeed, it is due to this perceived gap that Giralaldi will himself attempt to compose an epic, the *Ercole*, which was printed, though in unfinished form, in 1557. Giralaldi's letters to Bernardo in that same period help to clarify his position on the possible differences between romance and epic, and the strategies that he employs for writing the first classical poem in the vernacular. We will look at his general notion of the form of heroic poetry, in terms of meter but also his general aesthetic conception of heroic poetry. From there we will look at what distinguishes romance and epic as articulated in both the *Discorso* and his letters. Ultimately, Giralaldi's conception of classical epic depends largely on his understanding of narrative types. More specifically, Giralaldi views narrative unity and multiplicity as the primary means for differentiating between the “species” of heroic poetry. As a result, there are few, if any, other types of formal differences between romance and epic. Nevertheless, Giralaldi's general views on poetic language offer an important point of reference for understanding the more radical distinctions made by other authors between different kinds of poetry.

Let us begin by returning to the notion that the *ottava* had largely been ignored as a possible form until Ariosto's fame had been established in the 1540s. Giralaldi says as much in the opening pages of his *Discorso*, where he praises Boiardo for being the first poet of romance to produce a truly literary and enjoyable poem.<sup>1</sup> Giralaldi concludes, however,

<sup>1</sup> All excerpts taken from G.B. Giralaldi Cinzio, *Scritti critici*. ed. C.G. Crocetti. Milan: Marzorati, 1973.

that it is Ariosto, with the *Orlando furioso*, who guaranteed that chivalric romance would become accepted by the world (“accettata dal mondo e maravigliosamente diletta”).<sup>2</sup> According to Giraldi, prior to these two poets, virtually all authors of romance had produced crass and base works (“materie inettamente scritte”), trifles rather than true heroic poetry (“piuttosto cose da burla che da componimento degno dell’eroica gravità”).<sup>3</sup> Much like his statements during the *Canace* debate, Giraldi continually insists on distinguishing between two realms of culture, one popular—and unworthy—and the other a more erudite, “truer” form of literature. For Giraldi, there no longer exists the assumption that *ottava rima* automatically constitutes a popular verse form, but rather, that it can be further divided into “good” and “bad” usage.

In fact, Giraldi will further claim, though somewhat ambiguously, that the octave is the most noble metrical scheme (“la migliore maniera di versi”).<sup>4</sup> Such nobility (“altezza”) in *ottava rima* comes—perhaps somewhat surprisingly—from the combination of both sweetness and *gravitas*:

Accioché vi si vegga l’arte, lo studio ed il pensiero (senza incorrer però nel vizio) del compositore; e oltre a ciò porti con esso lei la dolcezza del suono e la gravità accompagnata col numero, e con le altri parti, che alla altezza convengono.<sup>5</sup>

For Giraldi, the sole guarantor of sweetness is rhyme (“le rime è tutto quel dolce, e quel soave armonioso che possono avere i nostri versi”).<sup>6</sup> As a result, *versi sciolti* are immediately eliminated as a possible metrical scheme, due to their lack of rhyme and their proximity to common speech, “parlar comune.”<sup>7</sup>

Instead, Giraldi claims that only two forms in the vernacular are available for narration: *terza* and *ottava rima*.<sup>8</sup> As we already saw in the *Canace* debate, *terza rima* is Giraldi’s first choice for such poetry, as it is “la più grave e la più grande ch’abbia insino ad ora la nostra lingua.” He also includes the important poetic models and authorities of both Dante and Petrarch. Moreover, for Giraldi, *ottava rima* seems preferable in its lyrical form

<sup>2</sup> *Scritti critici*, pg. 49.

<sup>3</sup> *Scritti critici*, pg. 50.

<sup>4</sup> *Scritti critici*, pg. 96.

<sup>5</sup> *Scritti critici*, pg. 96.

<sup>6</sup> *Scritti critici*, pg. 96.

<sup>7</sup> Repeating his criticisms of Speroni’s *Canace* in the *Guidizio*, Giraldi praises *verso sciolto* for drama, since the goal of drama is to imitate spoken language. For elevated poetry, however, such a verse form would be improper.

<sup>8</sup> Relying on the language seen previously, Giraldi refers to narration as the ability to “continuar una materia” and “la continuazione.” *Scritti critici*, pg. 99.

as an isolated stanza, similar to the classical epigram.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, he will accept *ottava rima* in order to not depart too radically from contemporary usage.<sup>10</sup>

Yet more than simply acquiescing to current fashions, Giraldi does go on to offer a historical reason for preferring *ottava rima*. The form was originally used by poets to sing before princes at court; as a result, it is better suited for a pleasant form of public literary consumption. The main reason that the *ottava* is more pleasant is in its enclosed structure. Due to its final couplet, both the poet and the audience have a moment of repose: “con grato e soave finimento dà luogo e tempo di pigliar spirito, ed a quello che dice ed a quello che ascolta, senza che s’interrompa l’ordine e la continuazione del componimento.”<sup>11</sup> Due to the continued preference for a publicly performed poetry, such repose has become a central feature to the aesthetics of poetic consumption in general. Thus, the ear is accustomed to hearing a pause and expecting the “wondrous delight” engendered by the rhyme of the closing couplet.<sup>12</sup> Such a view is more nuanced than that of someone like Matteo San Martino, who simply rejects couplets *a priori* due to their proximity and resultant—and inimical—sweetness. Giraldi, however, is attentive to the development and continuing preference for certain forms.<sup>13</sup>

### 5.1.2 Praise of *ottava rima*

Despite his hesitancy to embrace the form, Giraldi also offers the most exhaustive description of *ottava rima* seen so far. His initial point of departure is a description of the relationship between syntax and sound. He makes it clear that each octave should proceed two lines at a time; that is, each pair of lines should enclose a discrete unit of sense, which allows for a comfortable moment of repose even within the stanza.<sup>14</sup> As a result, techniques such as enjambment should be used sparingly, as they disrupt the sense of the octave and disorient the listener. Giraldi goes so far as to give an example of a stanza with enjambment that overflows outside of its normal two-line unit, thereby producing uneven syntax: “se ne va a guisa di torrente, le cui onde con schiumosi ravvolgimenti si giungano

<sup>9</sup> He writes, “da molti [ottava rima] è giudicata maniera di versi lirici.”

<sup>10</sup> “Per non mi partir dall’uso de’ buoni autori che di ciò hanno scritto e data autorità... pare che a questa sorte di poesia sola convegna.” *Scritti critici*, pg. 99.

<sup>11</sup> *Scritti critici*, pg. 100.

<sup>12</sup> “L’orecchia è avvezza a così fatta quiete e alla consonanza delle due ultime rime, la quale porge maraviglioso diletto.” *Scritti critici*, pg. 100.

<sup>13</sup> It must be emphasized that Giraldi’s attention is directed at the expectations of a certain socio-cultural group of consumers of poetry, namely his patrons in Ferrara. In other words, Giraldi can only talk of a “common” and expectation if he situates himself within a specific court culture.

<sup>14</sup> Giraldi describes the relationship between syntax and meaning in *Scritti critici*, pg. 108.

insieme, o l'una cacci l'altra, con suono piuttosto poco piacevole, che no."<sup>15</sup> According to Giraldi, sometimes it is necessary for the heroic poet to write this sort of stanza in order to accommodate particularly complex conceptual expression ("espressione del concetto"), but such contortions should largely be avoided.<sup>16</sup> In fact, Giraldi frequently emphasizes the poet's need to produce a "piacevole e natural corso del verso."<sup>17</sup> Thus the closing lines of the stanza are important. For Giraldi, when the rhyme is resolved with an especially pleasing sound, the poet not only offers his listener repose but also stimulates his audience to proceed forward. Harmony therefore reproduces the audience's desire to continue to read or hear the poem.<sup>18</sup>

The regularity and pleasantness of the octave both participate in Giraldi's more general literary aesthetic ideals: that of pleasant equilibrium. Every poet, in any genre, should strive for "purity" and "natural facility" ("purità, ed una facilità naturale") all of which results in a more general beauty ("vaghezza").<sup>19</sup> According to Giraldi, heroic poets may, following Aristotle's *Poetics*, use new and uncommon words and expressions ("usar nuove voci e torcere l'usate alquanto dall'uso comune").<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, such unusual forms should be used sparingly. Everywhere, Giraldi's emphasis falls on the "soavità del parlare," which is required if the poet wishes to provoke a moral or aesthetic response in his reader or listener.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the poet must avoid giving the impression of working hard, so that the poem seems "naturalmente fatta."<sup>22</sup> Ariosto, of course, offers the best example of an apparently natural facility: "in esso Ariosto si vede una maravigliosa natural facilità, la quale copre in guisa ogni sua fatica."<sup>23</sup>

The result of this fluid and easy movement is, surprisingly, that Giraldi's ideal poetry does not differ too drastically from well-written prose, a point which he himself makes.

dee cercare lo scrittore de' romanzi che tale sia l'orditura e il componimento dei versi suoi, che paiano le sue stanze una prosa non dico quanto al numero, perché con altri piedi corre il verso, e con altri la prosa, ma quanto all'ordine e alla facilità dell'orazione.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>15</sup> *Scritti critici*, pg. 110.

<sup>16</sup> Giraldi frequently returns to the notion that the poet should prioritize concepts over sounds and rhymes, i.e. that the poet should "farsi ... che le rime e le parole servano al concetto, non egli alle rime." *Scritti critici*, pg. 102.

<sup>17</sup> *Scritti critici*, pg. 111.

<sup>18</sup> *Scritti critici*, pg. 113.

<sup>19</sup> *Scritti critici*, pg. 109. Giraldi also emphasizes this style of writing in the *Canace* debate. See chapter 2.

<sup>20</sup> *Scritti critici*, pg. 128.

<sup>21</sup> "[Alla soavità del parlare] dee essere molto intento il poeta, per poter imprimere i costumi e gli affetti negli animi di chi lo ascolta, o di chi lo legge." *Scritti critici*, pg. 133.

<sup>22</sup> *Scritti critici*, pg. 134.

<sup>23</sup> *Scritti critici*, pg. 136.

<sup>24</sup> *Scritti critici*, pg. 135.

Matters of rhyme and sound—that is, issues which determine the specificity of poetry—are subsumed under a general theory of aesthetic experience. All works of literature, whether poetry or prose (together with their various sub-categories), should aim towards an ideal ease of consumption on the part of a reading or listening public. Stylization or radical breaks from normal usage are permissible in small quantities, but not so much as to disorient the audience.

But what about epic poetry? If it differs in some way from romance, what constitutes such differences? For Giraldi's discussion of specifically epic matters, we can turn to his epistolary exchange with Bernardo Tasso, already mentioned in the previous chapter, in which they discuss their respective epic projects, Bernardo's *Amadigi* and Giraldi's *Ercole*.

In a series of letters written in a period of roughly one year from the summer of 1556 to the winter of 1557, both Giraldi and Bernardo discuss the characteristics that distinguish epic from romance. The central concern of this discussion is the theorization of the modern epic; that is, the specific form that differs in kind from romance, but which also does not fall prey to some overly "classicizing" form that might be poorly received, such as Trissino's and Alamanni's works.

In Giraldi's opinion, the sole distinguishing feature of modern epic should be its narrative structure. A modern epic should focus on one hero, while also narrating multiple events over the course of that hero's lifetime. In other words, questions of style and language are much less important than problems of the unity and multiplicity of plot. In fact, the style of modern epic should largely follow the example of modern romance; purity, facility, and clarity continue to function as Giraldi's guiding aesthetic ideals.

The cycle of letters begins with a short missive from Bernardo to Giraldi, introduced in the previous chapter, where Bernardo complains largely about the popularity of chivalric romance. Giraldi's response, dated June 12, 1556, immediately takes up this problem of composing poetry intended for one's contemporaries as opposed to writing for no one—as in the case of Trissino:

E ho io sempre tenuto che siano stati mal consigliati coloro che, lasciata questa bella, e gentil maniera di Poesia, ch'è nata nella nostra favella, [...] si hanno pensato di acquistar maggior loda col seguire la via che tenne Omero, e che tenne il giudicioso Virgilio; che ancora che le poesie loro in que' tempi, e in quelle lingue erano, e sono poco meno che divine; ne' nostri tempi, nella nostra lingua sono poco meno che odiose; e se ne puote avere l'esempio dall'Italia del Trissino. Il quale siccome era dottissimo, così fosse stato giudicioso in eleggere

cosa degna della fatica di venti anni! avrebbe veduto che così scrivere, e come egli ha fatto, era uno scrivere a' morti.<sup>25</sup>

In other words, much like Bernardo, Giraldi is attentive to changing tastes and artistic preferences. Likewise, he also concludes that the sophisticated, though slavish, imitation of classical epics is not guarantee of success. For Giraldi, Trissino had spent twenty years toiling over a work of erudition that had no future and no audience.

Giraldi turns his attention briefly to Trissino's *verso sciolto*, reminding Bernardo that removing rhymes also removes "la dolcezza e la grazia," which are both necessary for poetry.<sup>26</sup> In fact, he also brings up the failed example of Alamanni and of his second epic poem, the *Avarchide*. Giraldi recognizes that Alamanni, more than Trissino, attempted to conform somewhat to modern tastes by giving up *verso sciolto* for rhyming. Yet, despite this metrical shift, Alamanni's work will most likely enjoy little success.

Perché s'egli [Alamanni] non usa in questo più felicità in allogare le rime, e in disporre le materie, ch'egli si abbia fatto nel suo Girone (del quale, prima che uscisse, si faceano tanti romori) oltre il tedio che porgerà al lettore quella minuta, e superstiziosa imitazione di Omero, porterà poca suavità, e poca grazia con così fatte consonanze.<sup>27</sup>

As with Bernardo, Giraldi takes issue with the notion that the diligent imitation of Homer detracts from the enjoyability ("suavità") of the work. In other words, it is not merely a problem of correct metrical scheme, but a larger attention to the plot and style of the poem.

### 5.1.3 *The Ideal of facilitas*

These remarks on meter, rather than opening up on to a discussion of rhyming, sound, and the specific form of epic, leads Giraldi to contemplate the more pressing issue at hand: where will modern epic come from? Giraldi offers no immediate answer in this letter, situating himself instead between the path of Antiquity and that of Ariostan romance: "Ma che sarà di me Sig. mio, il quale, fuori dell'uso di Omero, e di Virgilio, non seguendo l'Ariosto, od altri della nostra lingua, mi sono data a scrivere in Stanze la vita in uno Eroe?"<sup>28</sup> As a result, Giraldi's position is largely the same as Bernardo's who seeks a "third way" between the absolutely modern form of Ariostan romance and the failed

<sup>25</sup> Bernardo Tasso (1733). *Delle lettere di M. Bernardo Tasso*. Ed. by Anton Federigo Seghezzi. Padua, II, pp. 197-98.

<sup>26</sup> *Lettere*, II, pg. 198.

<sup>27</sup> *Lettere*, II, pg. 198.

<sup>28</sup> *Lettere*, II, pg. 199.

classicizing experiments of Trissino and Alamanni. Yet, while Bernardo would go on to write the *Amadigi* in a style that Lodovico Dolce would single out as “florido,” “ornato,” and appropriate for epic gravitas, Giralaldi’s style would receive less praise.

At some point in November or December of 1556, Bernardo writes a letter to Giralaldi claiming that he read and discussed the first canto of the *Ercole* with a group of unnamed *letterati* in Rome. While Bernardo enjoyed the beginning of the poem, many of the group responded poorly, claiming that the first stanza itself contained a style that was too “low” (“basso”) for an epic poem. Bernardo, though he claims that he defended the *Ercole*, also thinks that Giralaldi could elevate (“innalzare”) somewhat his language:

e quanto gagliardamente io prendessi in Roma la vostra difesa contra alcuni gentiluomini che, lodata in ogn'altra parte la prima Stanza del vostro Poema, l'accussava di bassezza; nella quale, ancor ch'io tenga per fermo che l'avreste potutata, e saputa con parole più sonore, e di maggior spirito innalzare.<sup>29</sup>

Bernardo does not offer any specific stylistic advice beyond the need for Giralaldi to use words which are more “sonorous.” At this point, the shift in the discussion of epic form has become more apparent. The issue remains that of epic “suitability,” but the object of discussion has changed. No longer are they discussing metrical form, but rather the quality of the language itself.

Although we do not possess Giralaldi’s direct response to Bernardo’s discussion—as several of the letters were lost or delayed—Giralaldi later wrote a letter defending the language of the *Ercole*.<sup>30</sup> The apology for his style follows closely the points on clarity seen earlier not only in his *Discorso*, but also in his condemnation of Speroni’s tragedy. Once again, he emphasizes the need to produce the sense of *facilitas*:

Sig. Tasso, io sono tanto amatore della facilità, e così nemico delle voci gonfie, e pompose, con strepiti delle quali veggo [...] alcuni nostri scrittori e ne’ Sonetti, e nelle Canzoni, e in tutte le loro composizioni cercare di dare spirito a’ loro concetti, che nol potrei dire: e questa è la cagione che io, contentandomi d’una certa eguale dittura di dire, seguito questo mio genio.<sup>31</sup>

By rejecting the stylistic experimentation of “alcuni nostri scrittori,” Giralaldi offers a more complex view of shifting contemporary tastes. Whereas initially he presented himself as a writer acutely aware of the common expectations and manners of a general literate

<sup>29</sup> The letter is dated 5 December, 1556; see *Lettere*, II, pg. 226.

<sup>30</sup> This letter is dated 14 September 1556. Bernardo claims, in another letter dated April 22nd 1557, to have received it in the first week of April: “Oggi sono quindici giorni ch’io ebbi le di V.S. delli quattordici di Settembre in risposta delle mie delli otto d’Agosto, accompagnate da parte del primo Canto del vostro libro.” There is thus a considerable gap in their correspondence between December and April. See *Lettere*, II, pg. 263.

<sup>31</sup> *Lettere*, II, pg. 259.

public—at least at court—here he seems to be setting himself against another trend, one which echoes his criticism of “Patavinitas” in the *Canace* debate.<sup>32</sup> The issue remains that of creating a poetic “facilità” in contrast to the pomposity and artificiality of certain writers of lyric poetry. Instead of employing bloated and noisy phrasing, Giraldi insists that proper poetic language should strive for clarity, while also shunning base and plebeian forms.<sup>33</sup> Giraldi also repeats the same point made in the *Discorso* concerning his desire to produce a form of poetry that is largely similar to prose, which is distinguishable only by the use of rhyme: “se si avesse a dire il medesimo in prosa, levatone la varietà del numero, non si direbbe con altre parole.”<sup>34</sup>

In another letter to Bernardo from this same period, Giraldi picks up on the same subjects and continues to defend his point of view on style and plot.<sup>35</sup> He begins by returning to the problem of the “pomposity” and “affectation” of certain literary styles, which he further attributes not only to contemporary authors but to specific classical models as well, such as Claudian, Ovid, Statius, and Horace.

Non mi rimarrò di dirle che 'n questo mio Poema ho voluto piuttosto pormi innanzi la natura, e la maturità di Vergilio, che la pompa di Claudiano, o i fiori d'Ovvidio, o le figure troppo affettate di Stazio, o i giri di Flacco, come quegli c'ho sempre mirato che i giri delle parole non siano quelli che mi conducano al fine, ma quelle che necessariamente nascano dalle cose, e che, quanto più si è potuto, non ve ne siano di oziose, e non paiano, come sogliono dire, poste nel Poema a pigione.<sup>36</sup>

As in the *Giudizio*, Giraldi contrasts a “natural” mode of writing with an artificial affectation. These classical analogues echo the point made in the *Giudizio* against Speroni's tragedy, that it was Virgil who succeeded in expressing the natural *gravitas* of Latin, while writers like Ovid were overly affected. Giraldi's strategy at this point appears to be one of legitimizing his own work against a perceived growing trend in contemporary poetry towards an affected style.

<sup>32</sup> See chapter 2.

<sup>33</sup> “Vero è che ho grandissimo riguardo a non porre nè nelle rime, nè tra versi parole plebee, o che non abbiano tutte la parte loro del sentimento.” *Lettere*, II, pg. 259.

<sup>34</sup> *Lettere*, II, pg. 259. There is a clear similarity between Giraldi's positions on epic as expressed in these letters and the views articulated in the *Discorso*. Giraldi himself in another letter to Bernardo remarks that he had worked on the treatise in an effort to clarify his own approach to his epic practice: “il qual Discorso composti solo per render conto della composizione dell'Ercole mio.” That letter is dated 10 July 1556; see *Lettere*, II, pg. 208.

<sup>35</sup> This letter is dated September 1st, 1557; see *Lettere*, II, pg. 291.

<sup>36</sup> *Lettere*, II, pg. 291.



Giraldi returns to these same figures in a later letter to Bernardo, dated October 10th, 1557, which contains Giraldi's most extensive comments on epic poetry.<sup>37</sup> This letter ranges over all the various aspects of composing an epic poem, from subject matter to language. It functions as a shorter, epistolary version of his earlier *Discorso*, although dedicated explicitly to epic. Yet the continuities in Giraldi's thought across all of his writings are immediately apparent. For instance, related to the classical authors mentioned in the previous letter, Giraldi repeats his desire to avoid certain ornamental and unusual "manners" of writing poetry.

E, per spiegar l'ordine c'ho tenuto quanto alle voci, e alle figure del parlare; non ho voluto accostarmi alla maniera nè di Stazio, nè di Valerio Flacco [...] che così duramente, e così figuratamente parlarono, che, oltre che torsero l'uso della lingua a non usate forme di dire, rimassero durissimi; quantunque negli spiriti poetici non fossero tra gli ultimi. [...] Nè meno ho voluto seguire Claudiano, e altri tali, c'hanno messa ogni loro industria solo nelle pompe delle parole, e ne' figurati modi di dire vagamente [...] hanno piene le carte di varie parole, ma di poco sentimento. Nè anco mi ho voluto proporre Lucano, od Ovidio ne' fiori, e ne' tratti, parendomi che questa diligenza sia loro riuscita a danno, onde quegli è piuttosto istimato pomposo istorico, che giudicioso poeta, e questi piuttosto ingegnoso, che grave.<sup>38</sup>

Giraldi's model remains Virgil, who took up a serious theme ("materia grave"), while also using words proper to the subject matter.<sup>39</sup> Such propriety lies in the avoidance of overly figurative language, unusual formulations, and a certain lexical pomposity. Here, he characterizes the poet who relies on such "artificial" constructions as merely "clever" ("ingegnoso") rather than actually serious ("grave"). This description strongly echoes his early condemnation of Speroni's tragedy and the stylistic tendencies of the Accademia degli Infiammati.

Ultimately, Giraldi's discussion of epic style is virtually identical to the same discussion of romance found in his *Discorso*. Fundamental to epic language is clarity, natural (though dignified) facility, and pleasantness of sound. Inimical to this style are overwrought stylistic figures and artistic affectation. Such language is distracting from the meaning of the poem (the "sentimento" or "cosa"), whereas a proper epic poem should be admired for its ease of comprehension. So what distinguishes the style of epic from that of romance?

<sup>37</sup> Further research should be conducted on the use of certain classical figures as representative of specific stylistic virtues and vices.

<sup>38</sup> *Lettere*, II, pp. 312-313.

<sup>39</sup> *Lettere*, II, pg. 313. It is also worth noting that Giraldi finds that after Virgil, the only other poet to achieve this kind of poetic language is Silius Italicus, "appresso [Vergilio], benché per lunghissimo intervallo, giunse più che niuno altro antico Latino Silio Italico." *Lettere*, II, pg. 313.

As it turns out, very little. In fact, for Giraldi, the entire problem of distinguishing species of heroic poetry lies in the narrative structure.

#### 5.1.4 *The Sandals of Venus*

In the same letter from October 10th, 1557 to Bernardo, Giraldi explicitly sets his own project apart from both contemporary romance and classical epic, entirely in terms of plot structure.

io in questa mia Opera non volli comporre Poema di una sola azione, ma mi proposi a spiegar ne' miei versi tutta la vita di uno Eroe, per porre uno esempio di lodevoli, e di onorate azioni nella nostra lingua sotto gli occhi di quelli che si dessero a leggere il mio Poema, quasi che io avessi isposta poeticamente una istoria, non mi accostando in questa parte nè a Vergilio, nè a Omero.<sup>40</sup>

Whereas the narrative of romance contains multiple actions performed by multiple actors, and that of classical epic is concerned with “one single action,” Giraldi wants to create the poetic version of history. Thus, blazing a new path in the construction modern epic, Giraldi will write the life of one hero, specifically Hercules. To explain the vast complexity of such a narrative, Giraldi spends a large section of his letter to Bernardo explaining his own strategy for gathering together so many plot threads. The variety of heroic examples, Giraldi hopes, will present not only a pleasant, but also—and more importantly—a useful kind of poetry for the public.

Giraldi is also quick to emphasize that he has no interest in helping the “common crowds.”<sup>41</sup> As a result, he returns to the earlier cultural division, condemning the pleasures sought out by the “multitude” (“la moltitudine”) in contrast with the “judicious and prudent” (“giudicioso e prudenti”).<sup>42</sup> Indeed, the “vulgar” crowd is unable to appreciate the true pleasure of reading such virtuous tales because they are not particularly aware of the source of their pleasure: “Il vulgo, quasi a caso, prende da ciò solo una lieve ombra di diletto, senza sapere perché tal cosa gli aggradi.”<sup>43</sup> In contrast to this dimly understood “shadow of pleasure” enjoyed by the “vulgo,” Giraldi wants to impress an intellectual public, whose understanding of the work would seem to guarantee a more authentic kind of enjoyment.

<sup>40</sup> *Lettere*, II, pg. 296.

<sup>41</sup> “Deve considerare l'autore [i.e. epico] quello che può meritar loda appresso a' migliori giudici, e non quello in che si compiace il vulgo.” *Lettere*, II, pg. 302.

<sup>42</sup> *Lettere*, II, pg. 303.

<sup>43</sup> *Lettere*, pp. 303-04.

Giraldi also makes the important point that his model for weaving together various narrative threads comes not from modern romance authors (“la maniera dei nostri Romanzatori”), but rather from Ovid. The Roman author was able to produce a chain (“catena”) of plots in his *Metamorphoses* while his work was also pleasant to read. Giraldi chooses Ovid as a model for plot—though obviously not for style—because the imitation of other classical authors tends to lead modern authors down the path of tedium and unpleasantness.

ho nondimeno veduto che il volere tutta volta stare su questa severità dell' antico, era troppo scostarmi dall'uso di oggidì: e come sarebbe stato porre i sandagli di Venere ad Ercole, se io mi fussi dato a seguire in tutto la forma dello scrivere dei nostri tempi; così la troppa antichità avrebbe fatta spiacevole la composizione; ho cercato con ogni studio, in quello che non mi ha paruto sconvolgere, seguire le vestigia dei nostri scrittori, acciocché col comune uso dessi ammolimento, e piacevolezza a quella severa gravità antica. E per questa cagione, essendo stato introdotto da' nostri poeti, e poscia accettato dal mondo, il costume di far cantare simili Poesie innanzi a' Signori, e ad onorevole brigata, non ho voluto in questa parte partirmi dall'uso accettato.<sup>44</sup>

With this comment, Giraldi returns to the main problem facing modern poets who wish to reproduce classical forms. The first issue is that of avoiding a strict imitation of certain classical authors, which creates a “severe” and “unpleasant” kind of poetry. Giraldi's implied target remains Trissino and Alamanni. At the same time, he wishes to avoid entirely following modern forms (“la forma dello scrivere dei nostri tempi”) for his epic poem, which he associates with the image of putting the sandals of Venus on the feet of Hercules. This image offers a variation of the same theme seen frequently throughout our investigation, namely that modern vernacular poetry is predominantly comprised of love poetry (Venus), which is poorly suited for epic poetry (Hercules).

Giraldi thus wants to find a balance between modern “softness” (“ammollimento”) and ancient *gravitas*. As a result, while “gravità” has heretofore represented an ideal for vernacular epic poets, it has now become an aesthetic risk due to the modern taste for “pleasantness.” Indeed, a poet seeking to reproduce fully “quella severa gravità” ends up condemning himself to obscurity. As Giraldi said of Trissino in his earlier letter, it is like writing to dead men (“uno scrivere a' morti”). As a result, according to Giraldi, epic poets seeking to enjoy success must make use of contemporary tendencies, namely the recitation of poetry before the court. He thus indicates the reception of a poem before

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<sup>44</sup> *Lettere*, II, pg. 305.

an audience as an accurate gauge for determining the successful navigation of the two cultural poles of the ancients and the moderns.

Ultimately, Giraldi emphasizes two main features with epic form. First, he prioritizes a unique narrative structure: the life history of a hero, rather than a sole action or a group of heroes. Second, the epic poet—although perhaps all poets—should use a clear and unaffected style. The goal of such poetry is, initially, social “utility” (“giovamento”); however, Giraldi also realizes that such poetry must also avoid an unpleasant, overly classicizing severity.<sup>45</sup>

As with Bernardo, Giraldi attempts to strike a balance between a desire to reproduce classical forms while also accommodating modern tastes. His recognition that chivalric romance constitutes its own genre leaves open “modern epic” as a gap in contemporary vernacular literature. Nevertheless, his attempt to produce his own epic seems to have resulted in a poem that was not especially popular, due largely to the style, which seems to lack the “elevation” expected of epic poetry. Yet, this lack of elevation also seems to conform to Giraldi’s own ideal of poetic “facilitas.”

Such facility can perhaps be seen in the first two stanzas of the *Ercole* itself:

Le fatiche, i travagli, i fatti egregi  
d’Ercole, i’ canto e le sue fiamme accese,  
e quante palme egli ebbe e quali pregi  
e per lo colto e per lo stran paese;  
come via più ch’imperatori e regi  
il nome suo per ogni parte estese;  
com’al fine arse di celeste foco  
e meritò di aver tra gli dei loco.

E ciò comincierò sin da le fasce,  
ché da le fasce Ercol mostrò quel ch’era:  
perch’uom simile a lui sin quando nasce  
indicio dà de la natura altiera;  
ché, se bene ad alcun par che si lasce,  
nel cantar de gli eroi, l’età primiera,  
questi fanciul mostrò sì la sua viva  
virtù, che degno è che sen parli e scriva.

Giraldi employs a syntactic structure that largely follows his own declarations in the *Discorso* and his letters. The octaves are organized according to couplets, such that a

<sup>45</sup> Luciana Borsetto offers an excellent summary of Giraldi’s guiding aesthetic principle: “Un *cursus* perfetto, epurato ugualmente da vizi di eccesso e di difetto, lesivi delle qualità retorico-stilistiche della *puritas*, della *proprietas*, della *facilitas*, della *suavitas* e del *numerus*.” See Luciana Borsetto (1982). «Tra normalizzazione e sperimentazione: appunti sulla questione del verso.» In: *Quasi un picciolo mondo. Tentativi di codificazione del genere epico nel Cinquecento*. Ed. by Guido Baldassarri. Milan: Edizioni Unicopli Milano, pp. 91–127, in particular pp. 102–103.

thought is always finished by the end of the second line. In fact, there is an extreme syntactic equilibrium that does not upset the forward progress of the stanzas. In this way, Giraldi can even employ a surprising enjambement in line 7 of the second stanza, which does not produce any lasting disorientation due to the immediate resolution of the rhyme.<sup>46</sup>

In search of the first successful vernacular epic, Giraldi thus offers, in 1557, the first possible alternative both to the hyper-classicizing examples of Trissino and Alamanni and to the newly proliferating Ariostan romances. That alternative seems to lie entirely in the structure of the plot, leaving little room for the development of a proper epic language. In this regard, Giraldi is both nuanced in his understanding of various types of narrative poetry, but also rather myopic in his attempts to deal with the central issue that has been running throughout the debates we have seen so far: how does one create a specific language and style that expresses “fully” or “appropriately” epic subject matter? A similar conception of romance and epic, though with different conclusions, appears in the works of one of Giraldi’s students, Giambattista Pigna. Rather than emphasize narrative structure, as we shall see, Pigna turns his attention to the formal-linguistic aspects of epic language.

## 5.2 PIGNA AND THE PRIORITY OF SOUND

Born Giovan Battista Nicolucci in Ferrara, Pigna had a strong humanistic education in his native city.<sup>47</sup> For instance, he was among the first students of Vincenzo Maggi’s early lessons on Aristotle’s *Poetics* in the late 1540s. In 1551, he himself began to teach rhetoric, eloquence, and classical poetry at the Ferrarese Studio.<sup>48</sup> By 1552 he became a member of the ducal court of the d’Este family, where he later became Alfonso II’s secretary in 1559,

<sup>46</sup> Since there does not appear to be any study of Giraldi’s *Ercole* in terms of its language, it would be interesting to look for any larger stylistic patterns; however, that would be well outside the scope of this project.

<sup>47</sup> Pigna later adopted his unique pseudonym from the symbol used by his father in his apothecary. For a recent biography of Pigna, along with a brief analysis of his various works, see Salvatore Ritrovato. “Nicolucci, Giovan Battista.” *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, 78, 2013.

<sup>48</sup> Pigna is one of the first intellectuals to study Aristotle’s *Poetics* in their formative years, meaning that his initial framework is not entirely grounded in classical rhetoric, but rather a mix of both rhetoric and “poetics.” It is likely that, for this reason Pigna is also one of the first intellectuals to attempt a large-scale integration of these approaches to classical poetry, combining Horace, Aristotle, and many other classical rhetorical treatises, in his *Poetica Horatiana*. Venice: Vincenzo Valgrisi, 1561. Little work has been done to look at Pigna’s conceptions of poetry in this work together with his vernacular statements.

following in the footsteps of Giraldi, who had also been one of Pigna's teachers in the 1540s.<sup>49</sup>

As with the analysis of Giraldi's thought, we will consider two moments in Pigna's theorization of vernacular poetry: first, his own treatise on romance, *I romanzi* (1554), then the theoretical discussion of epic poetry that precedes his own short epic "sketch," *Gli heroici* (1561).<sup>50</sup> Like Giraldi, Pigna distinguishes between classical epic and modern romance, a distinction which entails a lengthy discussion of both narrative structure and linguistic practice. The primary mode of distinguishing between the two species of heroic poetry remains that of unity of plot and character. Unlike Giraldi, however, Pigna does not set out to uncover a "modern" epic based on an untried narrative possibility (such as Giraldi's decision to narrate the life of a hero). Instead, for Pigna, epic—understood solely as the single action of a single actor—requires a restricted manner of narration and a particular use of language. Much like Giraldi, however, Pigna believes that the only way to make epic palpable is to follow in the footsteps of romance. As we shall see, Pigna's importance lies in his ubiquitous attention to the effects of language and the expectations of his audience, primarily in terms of sound.

### 5.2.1 *The Need for Repose*

In the *Romanzi*, Pigna's goal is the defense of romance in general, and the *Orlando furioso* specifically, including a lengthy explanation of Ariosto's life and poetic intentions. The treatise opens with an extended response to unnamed detractors of Ariosto's work, in which Pigna emphasizes the differences between epic and romance. Indeed, he writes that his work will make clear the rules by which romance—as a distinct form—is composed: "la regola si scroprià, con cui Romanzevolmente scriver si richieda: & come tale scrittura habbia una forma da per se."<sup>51</sup>

As in Giraldi's conception of romance, Pigna's distinction begins with the issues of the unity of plot and the role of historical verisimilitude. According to Pigna, following Aristotle, the basis of all poetry is imitation. Epic is primarily concerned with imitating

<sup>49</sup> This relationship of teacher and student leads a polemic between both men when they each publish their treatises on romance in 1554, with Giraldi accusing Pigna of plagiarism. See Stefano Jossa (2013). «Giraldi e Pigna sui romanzi: una polemica in contesto.» In: *Critica letteraria* 41, pp. 533–552.

<sup>50</sup> All citations from the first text come from *I romanzi di M. Giovan Battista Pigna*. Venice: Vincenzo Valgrisi, 1554. Citations from the second come from *Gli heroici di Gio. Battista Pigna*. Venice: Gabriel Giolito de' Ferrari, 1561.

<sup>51</sup> *Romanzi*, pg. 15.

some “true matter” (“una cosa vera”), while romance has no interest into truth: “Questi altri [poemi] alla verità risguardo alcuno non hanno.”<sup>52</sup> Moreover, epic poetry imitates the single illustrious action of a single person.<sup>53</sup> Poets of romance may treat multiple deeds by multiple characters, although there usually exists a main protagonist.<sup>54</sup> As a result of this focus on “erranti persone,” the form of romance itself becomes “altresì errante.”<sup>55</sup> In other words, the episodic structure, the use of the octave, and the tendency to digression all derive from the greater number of possible narrative threads. Yet this tendency to start and stop a potentially infinite number of narrative matters (“infinite volte cose infinite”) does not imply that there does not exist a rule for structuring plot.

The “rule” proposed by Pigna is quite simple: the poet must always take into consideration the audience. This point has implications not only for the production of new romances but also for understanding the history of the form itself:

percioché se bene l'ordine Epico non osserva, non è che una sua regola non habbia: la quale è questa, che quasi non può farne fallare. Tralascia o quando il tempo dà che s'interponga, o quando nol dà. Quando il dà, l'animo di chi legge, quieto rimane, dal che ha contentezza, & perciò piacere: restando egli con una cosa compiuta, come se un naufragio è finito, o una singolar battaglia, o un fatto d'arme, o una peregrinatione, o cose simiglianti. Quando nol dà, l'animo resta sospeso, & ne nasce perciò un desiderio che fa diletto: essendo che un certo ardore è causato, che è di dover la fine della cosa sentire.<sup>56</sup>

For Pigna, the governing principle in his considerations on poetry consists in a rather straightforward conception of aesthetic experience. A listener or reader who comes to a moment of repose in a narrative will experience contentedness and therefore pleasure, in the same way that someone finds peace after a shipwreck, a battle, or a voyage. The lack of such repose, however, also produces another kind of response, that of the desire for closure, which also generates a form of pleasure. Pigna thus offers a straightforward psychological description of the reality of listening to a well-written story. In the case of romance, this story may contain multiple narrative threads, which multiplies the possibilities of both closure or forward movement. Epic does not present a similar opportunity for closure, as it is focused on one single narrative.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>52</sup> *Romanzi*, pp. 19-20

<sup>53</sup> “Questa illustre attione a essere Epica, sarà una sola d’una sola persona.” *Romanzi*, pg.25.

<sup>54</sup> “I Romanzi si dan bene a più fatti di più huomini, ma che un huomo specialmente si propongono.” *Romanzi*, pp. 25-26.

<sup>55</sup> *Romanzi*, pg. 44.

<sup>56</sup> *Romanzi*, pp. 44-45.

<sup>57</sup> “Et perché ciò non fa egli l’Epico? perché più ristretto & più legato ha il suo poema. & perche cagione? per esser egli ad una sola attione d’un sol huomo tutto intento.” *Romanzi*, pp. 44-45.

According to Pigna, one might object that such a proliferation of narrative threads leads to a situation in which one can no longer keep in view the entire plot, like some kind of “ill-formed animal” (“animal sproportionati”).<sup>58</sup> However, Pigna states, this issue is irrelevant, since romance was created not for readers but for listeners (“non per li lettori, ma per gli ascoltanti”). As a result of this initial mode of consumption, all subsequent writers and listeners of romance had their ears accustomed to this form.<sup>59</sup> In other words, Pigna establishes a clear history for a modern tastes and preferences, which must always be kept in mind in the composition of a long narrative work, whether romance or epic.

This focus on the audience leads Pigna to distinguish clearly between the categories of poetry and prose. Like Giraldi, Pigna seems uninterested in recovering classical epic as such: “io non lodo lo star più ne’ termini della passata poesia.” (48) Yet unlike Giraldi, Pigna also places more value on the poetic quality of romance, in particular its differences from prose. For example, of the different kinds of words (“nomi”) available to a writer, in prose one can only use proper words (“propri”), metaphors (“translationi”), and ornamental terms (“ornamenti”). Prose requires such usage because it is closest to the natural, “middle” style of spoken language.<sup>60</sup> By contrast, poetry can make use of other kinds of words, such as lengthening, shortening, and other kinds of morphological variation. According to Pigna, such linguistic transformation is necessary in order to create a language as far from normal spoken language as possible.<sup>61</sup>

In other words, Pigna’s conception of poetic language is entirely different from that of Giraldi, who wants his verses to be almost indistinguishable from prose language, aside from the echoing sound of rhyme. For Pigna, classical hexameter is praiseworthy precisely because it never falls into prosaic language. In fact, he concludes that prose should be considered a “natural” language (“naturale”), while poetry is “artificial” (“arte”).<sup>62</sup> This distinction clearly sets Pigna apart from Giraldi in terms of their respective conceptions of literary forms.

<sup>58</sup> “Et se in un guardo tutto minutamente compresa non sarà, ciò non fa nulla.” *Romanzi*, pg. 45.

<sup>59</sup> “[C]hi l’udiva, quella sol parte capir si contentava, che per quel tempo cantata gli era: & poi quell’altra, che un’altra volta alle orecchie gli perveniva.” *Romanzi*, pp. 45-46.

<sup>60</sup> “Perciochè più piano rendono il parlare, & più al mediocre stile il conducono.” *Romanzi*, pg. 52. Drawing on Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*, Pigna lists eight general categories for employing a “name”: *proprio, straniero, translatione, ornamento, finto, allungato, abbreviato, commutato*.

<sup>61</sup> “Gli altri sono del verso [...] i quali tanto più si prenderanno, quando più da essa prosa discosto sarà il verso.” *Romanzi*, pg. 52.

<sup>62</sup> *Romanzi*, pg. 53.



5.2.2 *The Importance of Rhyme*

For Pigna, this artificial quality has produced a more pleasurable use of language. Indeed, he claims, the “artifice” of poetry allows for the expression of ideas and themes with a greater vigor and vivacity than prose:

perche di dilettere principalmente s'ingegna il poeta, ch'egli perciò il verso come più vago ha accettato: & come più al proposito a far che ne gli orecchi & ne gli animi nostri le lor materie entrino, che perché più vigore & più vivacità hanno, che le cose da prosa.<sup>63</sup>

Like Bernardo and Giraldi, Pigna focuses on the enjoyable element of poetry; however, he also offers a more sophisticated explanation for the relationship between pleasantness—understood in terms of sound—and the imaginative representation of the poem’s subject matter. While Giraldi tends to refer to the “pleasantness” of narrative structure, Pigna emphasizes the role of the ear in the consumption of a work of poetry.

Such an emphasis on the experience of poetry leads Pigna to discuss the traditional question of the appropriateness of a language or meter with a given subject matter. For Pigna, Greek and Latin poets used hexameter due precisely to the sound of the verse: “per essere egli [i.e. l’essametro] con più rimbombo sonoro, che tutti gli altri, & perciò attissimo in un soggetto grave & bellicoso.”<sup>64</sup>

Pigna immediately emphasizes the sonic quality of hexameter, which distinguishes his approach from virtually all of the preceding discussions of classical meter. Those earlier discussions continuously returned to the notion that hexameter allows for narrative continuity and *gravitas* largely because of the lack of rhyme. In other words, the peculiarities of the vernacular were used to explain retroactively the characteristics of classical languages. Instead, for Pigna, hexameter succeeds as an epic meter because it allows for a particularly effective sonority that accurately captures the serious and warlike themes of epic poetry.<sup>65</sup> In his view, such sonority lies in the nature of quantitative meter.

This is not to say that Pigna is not interested in narrative continuity. Indeed, when turning to the issue of vernacular metrical schemes, Pigna lists only two forms for narrative: *terza* and *ottava rima*.

l’uso ha indotto l’ottava rima, forse perché dovendosi pigliar una sorte di versi che fosse per una materia continovata, altra non ce n’era che ella, & la terza.

<sup>63</sup> *Romanzi*, pp. 53-54.

<sup>64</sup> *Romanzi*, pg. 54.

<sup>65</sup> Pigna briefly mentions previous poets attempting to imitate hexameter in the vernacular, focusing primarily on Tolomei’s failed metrical experimentation.

Ma la terza rima necessariamente di tre in tre versi va chiudendo il sentimento, & ratiene perciò il flusso delle parole, che molte volte per aggrandimento così tosto fermar non vogliono. & ne segue una perpetua simiglianza che è tutta demessa. Ma l'ottava è d'otto in otto.<sup>66</sup>

Pigna repeats the familiar vocabulary seen previously, namely “continuous narration” (“materia continovata”) and the phenomenon of necessarily ending an idea (“sentimento”) within a fixed metrical structure. For Pigna, *ottava rima* works better than *terza rima* because it allows for the flow (“flusso”) of an idea beyond the rhyme in the third line.

Pigna's rejection of *terza rima* also returns to earlier questions of “sweetness” and “gravity.” After claiming that *terza rima* presents a “lowly” form (“demessa”), he further explains his reservations in terms of sound:

questo suono fa solo dolcezza con l'humiltà accompagnata, la ove noi più gravità cerchiamo che altro. Adunque l'ottava che di due in due camina, perchè così la rispondenza delle finienti sillabe conformi non fa udirne, come la terza, è tutta via migliore per la maestà.<sup>67</sup>

According to Pigna, an *ottava* proceeds syntactically two lines at a time, meaning that there should be a moment of repose at the end of the second line. Given the ABABABCC rhyme structure of this metrical scheme, one should not hear the rhyme as forcibly until the closing couplet. By contrast, *terza rima* establishes its syntax across three lines, necessarily pairing its closure of meaning with its rhyme.

Moreover, while Giraldi is not particularly interested in rhyme (as it is merely an incidental feature that distinguishes poetry and prose), Pigna offers an extended discussion of the expressive nature of this “echo” between words.<sup>68</sup> First, he focuses on the use of rhyme as a kind of necessary and pleasing “bond” (“legamento”) required in Italian vernaculars. In fact, rhyming is perhaps “most sweet” in Italian, compared with other romance languages like Provençal, Spanish, French, due mainly to the fact that most words end in a vowel.<sup>69</sup> As a result, it is due to the absolute requirement of rhyme in Italian vernaculars that the rhythms between classical and modern poetry are entirely alien to one another.<sup>70</sup> Thus, attempts to reproduce classical meter in *verso sciolto* are only successful in

<sup>66</sup> *Romanzi*, pg. 54.

<sup>67</sup> *Romanzi*, pg. 55.

<sup>68</sup> Pigna refers to rhyme as a form of echo, “che è una ripercussione d'aere c'ha dal rimbombo dalla voce.” *Romanzi*, pg. 56.

<sup>69</sup> See *Romanzi*, pg. 58. This point will also return in Pellegrino's later discussion of language, as we saw above in Chapter 1.

<sup>70</sup> Thus, according to Pigna, translation between languages becomes rather problematic: “Il traducere dall'altre due lingue cosa alcuna perpetua de' poeti nella nostra è molto disagioso. Ne vale che dal Greco nel Latino ciò assai ben si faccia: perciocchè i loro numeri insieme convengono, & i nostri da i loro son totalmente diversi.” *Romanzi*, pg. 62.

attempting to reproduce the classical iamb—that is, the meter of dramatic writing, which, by its very nature, seeks to imitate spoken language. For Pigna, writers like Trissino erred in attempting to apply this imitative model to epic poetry, which requires—contrary to Trissino’s own reasoning—well-constructed and palpable rhythms:

molto meglio stato sarebbe, che il padre di lei [i.e. della tragedia la Sofonisba] generato non avesse nel medesimo verso l’Italia, che è poesia Epica; & perciò degna di pensati & pesati numeri, i quali l’energia loro hanno nelle rispondenti rime, & non nelle slegate.<sup>71</sup>

This statement agrees with Pigna’s earlier point that poetry is an “arte,” that is, something distant from common linguistic usage. Such an approach to rhyme is fundamentally different than that of Giraldi, who sees rhyme as merely marking poetry as such, rather than part of larger set of artistic strategies to ennoble a specific kind of language. Giraldi’s universal clarity is nowhere to be found in Pigna’s approach to romance, which instead sets forth a complex account of the reader’s or listener’s expectations with poetry—and the ways in which the poet can, and should, direct his attention primarily at his audience.

### 5.2.3 *Practical examples from Ariosto*

Pigna’s account of poetic sound gains greater clarity once he begins analyzing the concrete instances of linguistic and poetic use in the *Orlando furioso* itself, a topic which occupies the entirety of book three of the *Romanzi*.<sup>72</sup> Pigna writes in the introductory section of the third book that through comparing disparate—yet similar—objects, one can more clearly judge them.<sup>73</sup> Pigna intends to apply this approach to Ariosto’s language:

deliberato ho di spiegare la maniera del compor le stanze, & del conoscer i numeri & le voci migliori, col dire quali sieni i buon versi, & insiememente quali i cattivi, dalla quale contrarietà la corrispondenza n’è nasciuta.<sup>74</sup>

In order to make such comparisons, Pigna looks at earlier versions and drafts of the *Orlando furioso*, thereby taking into account Ariosto’s own “corretioni.”<sup>75</sup> Thus, he ultimately

<sup>71</sup> *Romanzi*, pg. 63.

<sup>72</sup> Book two is largely a biography of Ariosto, mixed together with a description of the plot and characters of the *Furioso*.

<sup>73</sup> “Insieme paragonate, molto meglio giudicar si lasciano [le cose], che se di loro ciascuna sola si vedesse, & dall’altre lontana.” *Romanzi*, pg. 122.

<sup>74</sup> *Romanzi*, pg. 122-123. He also gives another interesting example about better distinguishing a color when placed beside another: “un rosso che bello parrà, a lato a un sopravveniente ne più bello sarà tenuto, ne quasi rosso, ma mostrerà havere del bianco o del giallo.” *Romanzi*, pg. 122.

<sup>75</sup> *Romanzi*, pg. 123. In other words, Pigna takes up the 1532 edition as his source text, comparing it extensively with the previous two editions from 1516 and 1521.

has no interest in comparing Ariosto with other poets or other genres, in contrast to Ariosto's detractors who compare him to Homer and Virgil. Instead, Pigna intends to consider Ariosto's own literary intentions in making changes to his work: "con ogni minuta ragione andro a la causa penetrando, per la quale & qua & là varij luoghi cambiati si siano."<sup>76</sup> Pigna thus seeks to understand, in the clearest practical terms, the best ways with which to write a romance. As a result, many of the examples focus on analyzing Ariosto's artistic sense and his aesthetic reasons for modifying his poetry.

Indeed, the majority of the third book of Pigna's *Romanzi* focuses primarily on Ariosto's language, with an emphasis on the relationship between sound and sense. For Pigna, Ariosto's genius lies in his ability to use elements such as alliteration and rhyme to reinforce the meaning of the poetry. For instance, Pigna praises Ariosto's phrase "il vantator Spagnuol" (*OF*, 12.44.1). He states that this phrasing might appear ugly to most readers. Indeed, the grating sound produced by the "R" and the "SP" might be taken as a stylistic fault, and Ariosto could just as easily have written "lo spagnuolo vantator" without disrupting the meter. Nevertheless, Pigna claims, Ariosto chose to write this harsh combination of sounds because it lent itself to the present subject matter, which expresses disdain towards the Spaniard in the poem: "[Ariosto] veda che quella durezza serviva alla materia, perciochè prese quivi il nome di Spagnuolo in mala parte; & perchè fu Spagnuol è fatta la giacitura del verso, vi si può in un certo modo premer la parola, & esprimer l'odio."<sup>77</sup> Pigna concludes by exhorting future romance poets to take into consideration the ways in which the reader might be "helped" by the verse itself, which produces certain "effects in pronunciation."<sup>78</sup> Thus for Pigna, sound is not merely an ornament, but should become a central component in the production of sense.

Throughout the rest of the book, Pigna continues to emphasize that certain unpleasant sounds and strange letter combinations are not to be avoided. For example, he describes the "most noteworthy dissonance" ("notabilissima dissonanza") produced by rhyming unexpectedly in the middle of a verse, rather than waiting until the end of a line.<sup>79</sup> Such praise of the unpleasant sounds of poetry contrasts with the clarity and harmony championed by Giraldis.

In Pigna's view, local linguistic strategies, such as harsh letter combinations, are tied closely to larger narrative movement. Indeed, there seems to exist a homologous structure

<sup>76</sup> *Romanzi*, pg. 123

<sup>77</sup> *Romanzi*, pg. 133.

<sup>78</sup> "E' da sapere che i Romanzi molto cercar deono di scrivere talmente il poema loro, che facciano che il lettore sia tanto dal verso aiutato, che possa usar gli effetti nella pronontia che si ricercano." *Romanzi*, pg. 133.

<sup>79</sup> *Romanzi*, pg. 159.

across multiple formal levels: from the individual verse to two-line syntactic units to the octave to the plot itself. As a result, Pigna is able to relate Ariosto's use of strange words with his ability to interweave various plot lines. The result is a more general aesthetic experience for Ariosto's readers, who are left in a state of wonder: "tutto questo fa ch'egli [Ariosto] cerchi d'apportare cose nuove: & che facciano sempre restar maravigliosi i lettori, & con la mente sospesi."<sup>80</sup>

Yet Pigna is also careful to repeat the point that a poet should always strive to re-orient the reader or listener at some point. He stresses the need to balance novelty and repose. Ariosto, he claims, was also aware of the need to balance "new things" with repose. As an example, Pigna points to Ariosto's decision to end his poem with the tale of Ruggiero and Leone, a simple resolution which produces a sense of pleasant closure: "L'Ariosto adunque che di quest'arte era a pieno informato, volle conchiudere la sua poesia con un tal intrico [i.e. di Ruggiero e Leone], che facesse sollevare gli animi di chi legge infino alla fine della solution del viluppo."<sup>81</sup> Thus, for Pigna, despite Ariosto's frequent use of odd poetic language which leaves readers "maravigliosi," the *Furioso* always returns to a state of repose and tranquillity.

Pigna's conception of romance largely follows Giraldi's in its division of heroic poetry into epic and romance; however, his approach differs radically in the attention that it affords to the importance of the sound of language. He returns obsessively to the issue of rhyme—such as the different combinations, ranked according to their aural qualities—, rhythms, and the potential for sound to reinforce the sense of poetry, producing "vigor," "vivacity," and "energy." Such insistence on sound derives from his concern regarding the audience, and the need of poets to consider the effect of certain uses of language. It is from this same concern that he derives his literary history of romance, as well as his explanation of the reasons for which people continue to read and listen to such poems.

As a result of these historical factors, Pigna seems to believe that classical epic poetry is no longer possible for the vernacular, due to both radically different literary expectations and entirely alien linguistic structures. Despite his apparent resignation concerning the impossibility of vernacular epic, two moments suggest that Pigna continued to seek out this particular form. First, at a certain point in the *Romanzi*, Pigna alludes in passing to his contemporary, Francesco Bolognetti, whom he mentions as working on a new epic poem, the *Costante*, which has been praised by learned men: "ciò a giudicio d'ogni dotto tanto più loda gli accresce, quanto più disagiosa è la strada che a quel fine l'invia, ch'egli

<sup>80</sup> *Romanzi*, pg. 172.

<sup>81</sup> *Romanzi*, pp. 172-173.

honoratissimamente s'è proposto."<sup>82</sup> In other words, Pigna sees Bolognetti's project as a possible solution to the problem of epic. Bolognetti and his work will be the topic of the next chapter. The second matter which suggests that Pigna still believes epic is possible is that he himself turns to writing an epic work, known as *Gli heroici*, which he published in 1561, together with a brief treatise addressing vernacular epic.

#### 5.2.4 *The Ears of Heroes*

Pigna's "heroic" poem is, in reality, a "sketch" ("schizzo") of fifty octaves which recounts the fall of his patron, Alfonso II, Duke of Ferrara, from his horse during a jousting tournament. He describes this project as, more than anything else, an occasion ("occasione") to glorify the House of the d'Este to the rest of the world.<sup>83</sup> He states quite explicitly that he has already explained the art of chivalric romance, the form peculiar to vernacular heroic poetry. With his new work, he claims, he will treat the heroic poetry of Greco-Roman Antiquity, which has yet to find a modern equivalent:

Avendo io dimostrato ne' Romanzi la poesia heroica de' Volgari, intendo hora di trattare della medesima seconda la via de' Greci e de' Latini. Et perché tra i nostri scrittori non ho anche veduto alcuno, ch'habbia composto una così fatta Poesia, mi son messo, a fare uno schizzo, acciocché intorno ad esso potessi comodamente discorrere.<sup>84</sup>

Put simply, by the publication of this work in 1561, Pigna believes that no classical epic exists in the vernacular, thereby excluding the previous attempts of Trissino, Alamanni, Giralardi, and Bernardo Tasso. In order to remedy this apparent gap, Pigna offers his "sketch" as a way to begin a discussion concerning ways to move forward.

This "sketch" only appears after roughly 87 pages of discussion, most of which concerns the heroic history and virtues of the d'Este family. The majority of the treatise is a discussion of d'Este genealogy, with frequent reference to the current duke, theological matters, astrological concerns, and so forth. Poetic theory is largely absent. Pigna does, however, briefly address the issue of narrative unity and the necessary components of

<sup>82</sup> *Romanzi*, pg. 116.

<sup>83</sup> "Colsi la terribile occasione della sua caduta a Bles, per conoscerla atta a farmi soccedere una invention: onde io potessi diffondermi nelle sue virtù." Thus he writes "un Heroico di cinquanta stanze," as well as "gli Heroici, che sono discorsi fatti in quel proposito [...] [che] destando la memoria di que' tempi passato facciano goderle quella gloria, che hebbe principio in lei quasi dalle fasce; & ch'ora col solido premio della riputatione la fa magnificare da i più degni scrittori, adorare da suoi popoli, & ammirare da tutti i maggior Principi del mondo." *Gli heroici*, pg. 6.

<sup>84</sup> *Gli heroici*, pg. 7.

epic. He proclaims that his short poem consists of the imitation of one action by one single illustrious person, that it is based on history, that there is a supernatural element in the form of angels, and that the poem will produce a noble emotional response. It is clear, then, that the influence of Aristotle's *Poetics* on the conceptualization of epic structure is complete.<sup>85</sup> Yet, despite following the "rules," Pigna is unwilling to write an entire epic poem: "ma solo mi è bastato di formare uno schizzo della vita heroica."<sup>86</sup>

Despite this lengthy encomium to his patron, Pigna does offer a brief discussion on epic form at the end of the treatise, which focuses on meter and unusual language. Regarding meter, Pigna recycles the same notions described earlier in the *Romanzi*. More specifically, according to Pigna, an epic poet should use *ottava rima*, rather than *terza rima*, a verse form which produces a "humble" ("umile") sound due to the proximity of rhymes.

Si è accompagnato a questo gran soggetto il verso delle stanze per parere egli maggiore de gli altri, si perche è continuamente d'undeci sillabe, si per le commode desinenze che non l'obligano a concludere i concetti in tre in tre, & a far sentire le vicinanze di esse, il che ha dell'humile, si come fu già da noi dichiarato a bastanza con nuove ragioni.<sup>87</sup>

Pigna even explicitly refers to his earlier treatise, suggesting a continuity of thinking between the works. However, he only emphasizes the closure of ideas ("concludere i concetti"), rather than the more general aesthetic concerns of *gravitas*, sweetness, and so forth. Indeed, given his earlier emphasis on the quality of sound of the verse, it is surprising that Pigna offers no attempt to make sense of a particularly "epic" sound.

The only aspect of epic language that seems to interest Pigna is the question of diction and the use of foreign words. Recall that the use of foreign words is one of the few statements made by Aristotle in his *Poetics* concerning epic language. Pigna, however, hesitates concerning the adoption of new or foreign words. He prefers, instead, the use of "proper" terms:

Et massimamente per la grandezza di questa idea si siamo ingegnati d' aggrandire queste nostre stanze secondo quello che conviene, il che ci ha fatto usare le voci scielte, non havendo noi giudicato che sia ben fatto di prender delle nuove, delle straniere, & delle altre che non fossero o proprie della cosa, o della lingua, o figurate pur secondo l'uso.<sup>88</sup>

Pigna pointedly declares his intention to remain within the confines of the Italian vernacular, including limiting the use of figurative language to that which "follows usage." Such a position seems to follow that of Giraldi and his "facilità."

<sup>85</sup> Indeed, Pigna's entire description essentially follows Aristotle's basic precepts. See *Gli heroici*, pp. 11-15.

<sup>86</sup> *Gli heroici*, pg. 15.

<sup>87</sup> *Gli heroici*, pg. 81.

<sup>88</sup> *Gli heroici*, pp.81-82.

Pigna also justifies his decision to avoid linguistic novelty by claiming that strange and foreign words would not not please “the ears of heroes,” who may be seeking relaxation after a tiring day of work:

ho voluto servirmi delle voci accettate, & che non siano per dispiacere a gli orecchi de gli heroi. consistendo tutta la Poesia nel ristorare con honestà recreatione coloro, che stanchi dalle loro proprie professioni, alle volte ad essa si volgono.<sup>89</sup>

The heroes mentioned are most likely Pigna’s patrons, the members of the house of d’Este. In other words, in Pigna’s view, epic poetry should not present a particularly difficult or challenging kind of literary or mode of consumption. Instead, epic is merely another form of “recreation.” As a result, Pigna does not conceive of epic as an erudite or elevated form of literature that would only be intelligible to intellectuals.

Pigna then cites Dante as a negative example through his use of strange words in his poetry. According to Pigna, Dante was “forced to invent new words” (“costretto ad ingegnarsi di prender nuove parole, & nuove maniere di parlar”) for two primary reasons. First, Dante lived in a period that had not yet created a cultivated literary language (“il culto della lingua”).<sup>90</sup> This point largely echoes Speroni’s account of Dante’s poetic innovation, although in Pigna’s case Dante has not become a general model for poetic innovation. This is due to the second reason for which Dante invented new words, namely, that his poetry—being largely philosophical in nature—belonged to a category of literature dedicated to contemplative matters, rather than practical ones. According to Pigna, if Dante wanted to express concepts which had “never been heard in our language” (“nè mai più uditi nel nostro parlare”), it was due to his participation in largely philosophical poetry.<sup>91</sup>

Pigna thus establishes two categories of poetry that follow the classical philosophical division that separates human living into two possibilities, as either predominantly contemplative (i.e. dedicated to philosophical speculation) or active (i.e. invested in civil, political, and rhetorical matters).<sup>92</sup> Though Pigna does not intend to follow Dante, he can defend him according to Dante’s clear decision to write for “contemplative” readers, rather than “active” ones:

Pare a un certo modo che [la poesia di Dante] non sia così culta, come havrebbe potuto essere. Ma chi considererà che quel divino scrittore trattava materie

<sup>89</sup> *Gli heroici*, pg. 84.

<sup>90</sup> *Gli heroici*, pg. 84.

<sup>91</sup> *Gli heroici*, pg. 83-84.

<sup>92</sup> This distinction can be found in works such as Cicero’s *De officiis*. Speroni himself wrote a dialogue dedicated to the question, *Dialogo della vita attiva e contemplativa*. Despite the long tradition of this dichotomy, Pigna seems to be the first to use it as a means of differentiating kinds of poetry according to distinct social uses.



Poetiche per gli huomini contemplativi & non per gli attivi, come haveano fatto gli altri Poeti inanzi a lui ... vedrà in ogni cosa essere stato mirabile il suo giudicio.<sup>93</sup>

To justify further this claim, Pigna praises three great people who have brought “novelty” (“novità”) in modern times: Charles V, for his political conquest of the new world, and the poets Dante and Ariosto, for their innovative poems, which correspond to the contemplative and active types of poetry.<sup>94</sup>

Thus Dante becomes the supreme poet of contemplation (“speculatione”), while Ariosto is the poet of human action (“attioni humane”). Such a division allows Pigna to align himself with Ariosto and “action,” which requires an energetic language capable of rousing the spirits of his listeners. Pigna believes that not only should strange words be avoided, but—if possible—more pleasant versions of words should be employed whenever possible.<sup>95</sup>

The example offered by Pigna involves the use of place names, most of which are French, given the location of the tournament where the *Heroico* is set. Pigna lists towns such as “Loere, Amians, Renti” as producing a potentially ugly sound in the midst of a poem. Thus, in order to render them more pleasing he will employ the Latin versions of the names, specifically those used by Julius Caesar (“l’antico vocabolo usato da Cesare”).<sup>96</sup> As a result, his reader should expect to see towns named “Ligere, Ambiani, Vertodoni.” Since Latin is closer to Italian than French, these words will be much more pleasant (“assai più dolci a noi”).<sup>97</sup>

Pigna ends this short treatise with a discussion of the different types of rhymes that can be produced through changing words to better fit certain patterns. His concluding state-

<sup>93</sup> *Gli heroici*, pg. 82.

<sup>94</sup> “Nell’apportare novità a i nostri tempi, oltre le altre si sono scoperte tre grandissime persone: per l’acquisto del mondo nuovo Carlo Quinto, per conto di due nuove poesie Dante & l’Ariosto.” *Gli heroici*, pg. 82.

<sup>95</sup> Pigna further claims the vernacular does not need to borrow from other languages, as its own vocabulary is self-sufficiently beautiful: “Et che i nostri anchora essi sono assai più vaghi con le loro parole che con la varietà dell’altrui, ogni volta che essa varietà sia di voci che non s’intendano & non si confacciano con le Italiane.” *Gli heroici*, pg. 82.

<sup>96</sup> *Gli heroici*, pg. 84.

<sup>97</sup> *Gli heroici*, pg. 84. This entire discussion offers an interesting starting point for analyzing the different ideological frameworks governing statements for preferring Greek or Latin writers. Pigna’s view, for example, contrasts with the one seen in Speroni, namely that Dante resembles most closely Homer and classical Greek poetry. For Speroni, Dante (and Homer) become universal models for poetic innovation, while Pigna is much more reserved in his praise. Indeed, Pigna seems to associate a specifically Latin form of literature with contemporary heroic ideals of virtue. What is the relationship between Latinity, the active life, and heroic virtue that might not be available with Greek writers? Does a more Greek approach entail a more “contemplative” outcome, such as Dante? I suspect that the determining factor in these instances has something to do with the patrons, such as Alfonso II, who wish to cultivate Latin—or more specifically Roman—image, one related to Caesar, empire, and power. In other words, we are dealing with different versions of “classicism” that are primarily directed at not only the appropriation of images and ideas (virtue, heroism), but also more concrete elements such as Latinate—rather than Greek, erudite, obscure—language.

ment reiterates the need to consider the position of a word in a line and its subsequent importance for an audience while listening to the verses. He focuses his last remarks on the simple fact that rhyme words are perhaps the most important for thinking about sound because they are virtually isolated given their unique position, while the remaining words are incorporated (“incorporate”) into the line. As a result, the epic poet should take particular care that the rhyme words are meaningful, well-structured, and pleasing to the ears:

perciochè la parola della desinenza ha d’havere tutte le parti ch’alla scielta convengono. & queste sono l’esser buona nel senso, acconcia nella positura delle lettere di tutta se stessa, & grata particolarmente nelle due ultime sillabe. percioché ella ferisce più l’orecchia d’alcuna delle altre: le quali tutte sono incorporate nel verso, & non paiono a un certo modo disgiunte come quella che sta nella fine.<sup>98</sup>

We end with this quote—which closes the treatise as well—in order to emphasize the absolute priority of sound within Pigna’s conception of poetry, whether epic, romance, or any other form.

Due to this level of explicit attention to the different expressive possibilities of sound, Pigna offers a novel approach to conceptualizing vernacular epic poetry—understood, however, as largely complementary to romance. Of course, earlier writers on grammar and poetry, from Bembo to Daniello and others, do refer to rhymes and their qualities. Yet Pigna seems to be the first to distinguish explicitly the relationship between different manners of organizing sound and the expectations of the ear. Ultimately, he does not offer a formal distinction between modern romance and modern epic, either in terms of narrative, like Giraldi, or in terms of meter. Instead, it seems to be largely a question of following the precepts of Aristotle in the construction of a unified plot with one protagonist. Despite these references to Aristotle, Pigna focuses the majority of his theoretical energy on problems of expression and reception, making his poetic interests largely aesthetic in nature.

To understand the difference in approach between Giraldi and Pigna, we can turn to the first two stanzas of the *Heroici*, which are notably different in tone, language, and style from the opening lines of Giraldi’s *Ercole*.

Qual celeste virtù del gran Monarca  
Havesse di pietà le voglie accense,  
Si ch’aggiungesse fila a la sua Parca  
D’Hercol secondo il primo figlio Estense,

---

<sup>98</sup> *Gli heroici*, pg. 87.

Quand'ella a lui di lunga vita parca  
 Spintolo dal Corsier quasi lo spense;  
 Tu ch'a la mente eterna t'avicini  
 Dimmi intelletto fuor de tuoi confini.  
 Era dal disleal Destrier a pena  
 Il generoso & gran Signor caduto;  
 Ne il capo ancor ne la fallace arena  
 Impresso havea col colpo in terra havuto,  
 Che del mondo la parte alma e serena  
 Ratta si mosse per recargli aiuto.  
 Et trasse d'ogni ciel l'alte sembianze  
 L'Angel primier di Marte a le sue stanze.<sup>99</sup>

Compared with Giraldi's opening stanzas, these lines are immediately more complex in terms of their syntax, phrasing, and phonic texture. The first stanza sets up a direct appeal to a "celeste virtù," a grammatical subject which remains in suspension for six lines within a twisting hypotactic structure full of compact subjunctive clauses. The main verb only arrives in the last line: "Dimmi." In line 4, there is a loosely chiasmic structure produced by the sequence of "secondo" and "primo," set between "D'Ercol" and "figlio." In the second stanza, Pigna also delays the introduction of the grammatical subject ("Il ... Signor"), while also twice splitting the verb from its auxiliary ("Era ... caduto", "havea ... havuto"). The final two grammatical subjects ("la parte alma"; "L'Angel primier") are also delayed to the end of their phrases.

In terms of sound, the first stanza has a high number of consonant clusters, especially in the rhyme words ("Monarca," "accense," etc.). Certain sounds are also repeated, such as "SP" ("spintolo," "spense") in line 6. There is also a *rima equivoca* with "Parca/parca," producing a bizarre pun within five lines of the beginning of the poem. In the second stanza there is frequent alliteration: in line 1 with "D" ("dal disleal Destrier"), in line 4 with "C" and "HAV-" ("havea col colpo... havuto").

Ultimately, we are presented with a clever, sophisticated, and skillful poet. This approach differs significantly from Giraldi's *sprezzatura*, which seeks to narrate an immediately intelligible heroic story. Pigna, on the other hand, is much more sensitive—and interested in—other expressive possibilities available in the language itself.

Giraldi and Pigna present examples of writers attempting to justify theoretically modern poetic forms. Unlike Fornari, they don't see Ariosto as the first epic poet, but rather the culmination of a specifically modern form, chivalric romance. Their treatises then

<sup>99</sup> *Gli heroici*, pg. 89.

attempt to account for the formal specificity of this type of literature, which is distinct from classical epic. Giraldi attends primarily to the narrative structure and the question of narrative unity and multiplicity. Pigna follows a similar distinction, but his interest lies largely with the use of sound, specifically in Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*. Both writers are engaged in the discussion of explaining the modern practice of listening to poetry and the need to take into account the reception of a work by the larger society.

The earlier aesthetic terms of *gravitas*, *piacevolezza*, *dolcezza* do return. In Giraldi's *Discorso* (1554) and his letters (1556-57), it appears that the search for classical *gravitas* has produced a form of writing that lacks any sort of enjoyable qualities. As a result, poets must attend to the natural sounds of the vernacular itself and the preferences of the majority of listeners of such poems. The lesson learned from Trissino and Alamanni was that an overemphasis on classicizing poetry would lead to failure. Giraldi's stylistic ideal remains a cultivated naturalness, one which uses a more elevated form of language (that is, avoiding crass diction) without becoming overly erudite or pedantic. Moreover, he wants a poetic language that is largely indistinguishable from prose.

Pigna, on the other hand, views poetry as more malleable and strange by necessity. In his *Romanzi* (1554), he argues that poets should strive to avoid natural language in an effort to produce a more effective and lively artistic experience. In the *Heroici* (1561), he even claims that epic should strive to offer, more than anything, a form of "recreation." Whereas in Giraldi, the notion of *gravità* was associated with classical narrative structures, Pigna reintroduces the term as a function of hearing the proximity of rhymes. As a result, *ottava rima* becomes the ideal form for both romance and epic due to the ability of the poet to pause every two lines, without needing to rhyme. *Terza rima*, however, requires the completion of one's thought with the rhyme, thereby producing a sense of *dolcezza*. In other words, Pigna seems largely uninterested in matters of narrative unity or multiplicity.

Ultimately both of these writers view romance, or at least Ariosto, in a positive light. They seek to defend this form of poetry against a group of unnamed detractors. More than likely, they are also responding to the recent failed epics of Trissino and Alamanni, which suggested a new approach to producing vernacular heroic poems. Yet, while Giraldi and Pigna support romance and Ariosto—despite also seeking vernacular epic—, other writers take the opposite stance. As we saw earlier, Pigna acknowledges that a contemporary of his, Francesco Bolognetti was also composing an epic poem known as *Il Costante*. As we shall see, Bolognetti's poem became a beacon of hope for intellectuals in the 1550s and 1560s who refused to acknowledge the artistic value of chivalric romance.

Indeed, Bolognetti himself would come to view romance as having a largely pernicious effect on contemporary poetic usage and tastes, thus requiring more drastic attempts to produce a true epic poem. Within this perspective, romance—and its audience—are inimical to the epic project, which turns instead to a more elite type of poetry, one meant to be enjoyed by an exclusive group of intellectuals.

## 6.1 FRANCESCO BOLOGNETTI: NEW EPIC HORIZONS

Francesco Bolognetti (ca. 1510-1574) was born in Bologna to a wealthy family of lawyers and political figures, thanks to whom he had a substantial education with well-known humanists in his youth, before studying the Bolognese Studio.<sup>1</sup> Bolognetti's life was spent almost entirely in Bologna, where he focused primarily on civic and political administration. He was also interested in literature, participating actively in local academies, hosting salons, and remaining in contact with many poets and thinkers in the region, notably the same writers we have already studied: Speroni, Muzio, Giraldi, Pigna, Bernardo Tasso, and others.<sup>2</sup> Apart from his connection to other important poets and intellectuals, Bolognetti also found time to write a substantial amount of poetry, including an epic poem *Il Costante*, shorter narrative poems (including a poem celebrating the Battle of Lepanto in 1571), a verse biography of Thomas Aquinas, and many lyrical poems (including sonnets, eclogues, and others). Of particular importance are Bolognetti's *capitoli*, verse letters written in *terza rima* dedicated to various intellectuals, which present valuable information on Bolognetti's own position concerning epic poetry throughout the 1550s and 1560s.<sup>3</sup>

Before turning to Bolognetti's various epistolary exchanges, let us first look at several statements made by other writers in the mid 1550s concerning his epic, *Il Costante*. Though the first edition of this poem would not appear until a decade later, these early references to Bolognetti's work suggest a certain degree of excitement about the very existence of

<sup>1</sup> For a biography of Bolognetti, see Albert N. Mancini (1989). *I capitoli letterari di Francesco Bolognetti: Tempi e modi della letteratura epica fra l'Ariosto e il Tasso*. Naples: Federico & Ardia, pp. 15-22.

<sup>2</sup> As Mancini notes, by the 1560s, Bolognetti had become a fundamental point of reference in the "establishment letterario del tempo," as noted by his frequent correspondence with, among others, Giovanni Della Casa, Annibale Caro, Speroni, Giraldi, Pigna, Pier Vettori, Giovan Andrea dell'Anguillara, and Marcantonio Flamminio. He also had more lengthy epistolary exchanges with Bernardo Tasso and Girolamo Muzio. He also hosted in his home in Bologna important figures from Benedetto Varchi to the young Torquato Tasso. To say that Bolognetti was well-connected to the mid-century literary world would be an understatement.

<sup>3</sup> It is worth quoting Mancini on Bolognetti's participation in the literary world as a form of aristocratic leisure—that is, as a fundamentally privileged position radically different from that of Bernardo or Torquato Tasso, who lived according to the patronage they were able to acquire: "La sua vita è condizionata, quindi, se non dominata, dalla preoccupazione delle cure familiari e pubbliche. A queste sono subordinate l'*otium* arisocratico, fra ricerca creativa e lettura professionale." *Capitoli*, pg. 22.

an epic. In fact, Bolognetti seems to offer a degree of hope for the future of classical epic in the same period that Ariostan romance has become the norm and the efforts of Trissino and Alamanni ended in failure.

### 6.1.1 *A New Hope*

The *Costante* appeared in print in stages.<sup>4</sup> Although Bolognetti began working on the poem sometime at the end of the 1540s, the first eight books appeared in print in Venice in 1565.<sup>5</sup> An expanded edition with sixteen books was then published in 1566.<sup>6</sup> Of the various writers previously examined, at least three identify Bolognetti as a poet dedicated to the production of an authentic vernacular epic poem; these writers are Benedetto Varchi, Giambattista Giraldis Cinzio, and Giambattista Pigna.

Benedetto Varchi, in his lecture on heroic meter (1553), mentions Bolognetti while enumerating the different metrical possibilities in the vernacular for epic poetry. After listing the best attempts to write heroic poetry in *ottava rima*, Varchi writes: “si può aggiungere ... quella [autorità] di M. Francesco Bolognetti, il quale scrive il suo poema eroico, intitolato da lui Costante Pio e al nostro eccellentissimo Duca indiritto con questa maniera medesima di versi [i.e. in *ottave*].”<sup>7</sup> It is clear that, by the early 1550s, not only has Bolognetti already set the title and subject matter of his work, but he also announced his intention to dedicate it to Cosimo I de’ Medici.<sup>8</sup> Although Varchi does not offer any further comment on the form of the poem itself, it is evident that Bolognetti has already settled on using *ottava rima*.

Giambattista Pigna briefly mentions Bolognetti in the second book of his *Romanzi* (1554), while outlining the literary accomplishments of Ariosto. Despite writing that Ariosto had believed that classical epic poetry was impossible in the vernacular, Pigna immediately refers to Bolognetti’s ongoing project to write “heroically”:

<sup>4</sup> For a description of the composition process, see Mancini, *Capitoli*, pp. 15-22.

<sup>5</sup> In a work dedicated to the analysis of proper names in the *Costante*, Vincenzo Beroaldo writes in 1552 that Bolognetti had been working for several years. See *Declaratione di messer Vincentio Beroaldi sopra tutte le voci proprie che si contengono nel Costante di messer Francesco Bolognetti*. Bologna: Alessandro Benaci, 1570. For the first printed edition, see *Il Costante di m. Francesco Bolognetti*. Venice: Domenico Nicolino, 1565. It seems plausible that this edition was printed without Bolognetti’s consent or knowledge. Not only was it printed in Venice, when the majority of Bolognetti’s works appeared in Bologna, but it only contained eight books, whereas Bolognetti had most certainly finished the entire poem by that point.

<sup>6</sup> *Il Costante di m. Francesco Bolognetti*. Bologna: Giovanni Rossi, 1566.

<sup>7</sup> Benedetto Varchi (1859). *Opere*. Ed. by A. Racheli. Vol. 2. Trieste: Lloyd Austriaco, pg. 718.

<sup>8</sup> An early draft of five cantos, written in Bolognetti’s hand, is in fact dedicated to Cosimo de’ Medici. This manuscript can be found in Florence, at the Biblioteca Laurenziana, XLI, XXXII.

Tutta volta M. Francesco Bolognetti Heroicamente il suo Costante conduce, & ciò a giudizio d'ogni dotto tanto più loda gli accresce, quanto più disagiosa è la strada che a quel fine l'invia, ch'egli honoratissimamente s'è proposto.<sup>9</sup>

While in Varchi's account, Bolognetti is merely composing a heroic poem in *ottava rima*, Pigna frames the issue as a potentially impossible task, one which Ariosto himself refused to attempt.

Giraldi, in a letter to Bernardo Tasso from June 1556 describes his pleasure at seeing an early draft of Bolognetti's poem:

ho io veduto dal Magnifico Sig. Francesco Bolognetti [...] alcuna parte di un suo Poema fatto in ottava rima, di una sola azione dello Imperadore Costante, che mi ha molto piaciuto; e forse è il meglio che si sia veduto dopo l'Ariosto: però che, ancora che sia Poema di una sola azione, l'ha egli molto felicemente variato.<sup>10</sup>

More than Varchi and Pigna, Giraldi offers further analysis of the structure and content of the poem. Apart from noting the use of *ottava rima*, he also emphasizes the narrative structure, which is comprised of a "unified action" ("una sola azione") with variation ("variato"). Within Giraldi's schematic understanding of heroic poetry, Bolognetti's poem fits within the category of "classical" epic due to its strict narrative unity. Nevertheless, Giraldi feels that the poem's "variation"—which appears to be different from multiplicity—saves the work from falling into the category of chivalric romance.<sup>11</sup>

It is clear that for all three of these writers, there is a general feeling that Bolognetti has, in some way, figured out the problem of vernacular epic. In fact, there was even a collection of poems in praise of Bolognetti's epic, "Componimenti in lode di Francesco Bolognetti autore del Costante," put together sometime in the early 1550s. It was signed by important figures such as Varchi, Pigna, and even Trifone Gabriele.<sup>12</sup> Early copies of the poem were clearly in circulation among various intellectuals in the Veneto region, Ferrara, and Florence.<sup>13</sup> No other poem, from Bernardo's *Amadigi* to Giraldi's *Ercole*, seems to have generated the same amount of anticipation.

9 *Romanzi* (1554). *I romanzi di M. Giovan Battista Pigna*. Venice: Vincenzo Valgrisi, pg. 116.

10 Found in Bernardo Tasso (1733). *Delle lettere di M. Bernardo Tasso*. Ed. by Anton Federigo Seghezzi. Padua, II, pg. 199.

11 As we shall see in the next chapter, this distinction between variation and multiplicity forms the basis for Tasso's discussion of epic narrative. Unfortunately Giraldi does not offer any discussion of this particular concept; however, it is not hard to imagine that there are other authors in the late 1550s who are beginning to reconceptualize romance and epic in a more robust manner than simply unity vs. multiplicity.

12 The collection was compiled by the humanist and doctor Alberico Longo, whose death in 1555 left it unfinished. For Bolognetti's relationship with Longo, see Mancini, *Capitoli*, pp. 113-126.

13 Vincenzo Beroaldo's letter from 1552 notes that intellectuals often visited Bolognetti's house where he would present his epic work. See above.



Indeed, even after the unfinished printed editions emerged, Bolognetti's poem continued to serve as a singular example of vernacular epic poetry. For instance, the blind poet and orator Luigi Groto (also known as Cieco d'Adria) wrote a letter to Bolognetti, dated March 10th, 1571, praising the work as the first "true" epic in a modern language:

Hora la nostra lingua si maraviglia di se stessa che non credeva di poter tanto accogliere in se la vera forma d'un Heroico poema, quale accolsero i greci, e i latini. Hora s'avvide il mondo, come 'l nostro Idioma, lasciati i romanzi de gli Orlandi, e de Rinaldi aggroppati di varie e tra se malgiunte attioni, può ricever la forma d'un'opera, ove si tratti una attione sola, e perfetta; la Iliade, e la Odissea d'Homero, e la Eneida di Virgilio, che mettevano sì grande spavento alle muse Thosche, hora non isdegnato (toltala in mezo) di ricever la Costantiade per sorella.<sup>14</sup>

While Groto continues to insist on the *Costante's* narrative structure and unity of action ("una attione sola, e perfetta"), he also offers little commentary on the form and metrical scheme of the poem. By now, *ottava rima* seems largely unproblematic. At the same time, Groto's statement demonstrates a newer and much more palpable animosity towards chivalric romance in general, which is no longer defined under the aegis of Ariosto. Despite the earlier efforts of intellectuals from Fornari to Pigna to defend—and elevate—the practice of romance, the form continues to be seen, at least by certain figures, as an obstacle to achieving a truly classical form.

In reality, distaste for romance and dissatisfaction with the current state of vernacular letters both appear to be principal motivations for Bolognetti's decision to undertake the *Costante*. Let us turn to his correspondence with other intellectuals in order to trace the development of this newer, highly intellectualized position.

#### 6.1.2 *The Network of Discontent*

By looking at the discussion surrounding both the growing pessimism about vernacular epic in general, as well as the response to Bolognetti's in particular, we will have a clearer sense of the stakes of such activity in the late 1550s and early 1560s. We will begin by looking at the various statements, both in poetry and prose, made by Bolognetti and various interlocutors about the state of vernacular literature. From there we will turn to analyze the responses to—and controversies surrounding—the *Costante*, specifically the

<sup>14</sup> Cited in Mancini, *Capitoli*, pg. 131, n.3. Originally found in *Lettere famigliari di Luigi Groto cieco d'Adria*. Venice: Giovachino Brugnolo, 1601, pg. 85.

critiques concerning its language made by Bernardo and Speroni, as well as the energetic support of a Genovese intellectual named Marc'Antonio Tritonio.

Bolognetti sent *capitoli* and letters to a large number of important literary authorities, several of which are crucial to clarifying his position, as well as understanding the shifting emphases in the debate over epic. First, there is Bolognetti's *capitolo* from 1555 to Giraldi praising the latter's *Ercole*. Second, there are several of Bolognetti's *capitoli* and prose letters sent to Annibale Caro and Speroni dated between 1562 and 1565 concerning revisions of the *Costante*. Lastly, Bolognetti exchanged letters with other poets, such as Girolamo Muzio and Giovanbattista Morello, on issues of meter and the ideal audience of epic.<sup>15</sup> These various exchanges configure into an image of a large group of poets and intellectuals who continue to lament the lack of a true epic in the vernacular. Such a position, as we shall see, derives from the general dissatisfaction with the attempts at epic by Trissino and Alamanni, as well as the view that traditional vernacular poetry, whether Ariostan romance or Petrarchan lyric, is preventing modern writers from reaching the ideal summit of great literature.

The first clear statement about the stakes of writing epic poetry is found in Bolognetti's *capitolo* to Giraldi, written around 1555, a time when both men were in the midst of composing their respective poems.<sup>16</sup> Much of Bolognetti's verse letter contrasts recent failures in the vernacular—from romance to the unsuccessful epics of Trissino and Alamanni—with the untapped potential of the language, which is destined to equal classical letters. He begins by remarking that both he and Giraldi are moved by the same thought regarding the lack of a true epic in the vernacular:

Questo è, perciò ch'i Toschi anchor non hanno  
Marte cantato con Heroici carmi  
Ma rozzi, e inculti fra Romanzi stanno.<sup>17</sup>

Immediately it is clear that, unlike Giraldi and Pigna, Bolognetti harbors no enthusiasm or praise for Ariosto, who he believes received the laurel crown without reason ("Senza ragione (a mio giudicio) parmi").<sup>18</sup>

Bolognetti also laments the other two poets who had attempted epic, Trissino and Alamanni:

Colui [i.e. Trissino] non men, che con nessun decoro  
Trovate nuove letre, al fin d'Homero

<sup>15</sup> All texts, unless otherwise noted, are from Albert M. Mancini, *I capitoli letterari di Francesco Bolognetti*, Napoli: Federico & Ardia, 1989.

<sup>16</sup> For an introduction to the *capitolo*, see Mancini, *Capitoli*, pg. 135. The text appears on pp. 147-152.

<sup>17</sup> *Capitoli*, pp. 147-48, vv. 4-6.

<sup>18</sup> *Capitoli*, pg. 148, v. 9.

Colse lo sterco, e non conobbe l'oro,  
 Di Giron lo scrittor [i.e. Alamanni] forse il pensiero  
 Hebbe lontan di voler gire a quella  
 Meta, ch'io dico, e prese altro sentiero.<sup>19</sup>

For Bolognetti, they each failed for different reasons: Trissino because he imitated Homer too closely without understanding his art and Alamanni because he ultimately diverged from the original path of his project. According to Bolognetti, given such failures, the only successful poetry appears to be the “rozzi carmi” of romance, together with love poetry, ubiquitous in the vernacular.

For Bolognetti, the popularity of both of these forms has produced the general (though false) impression that the language is incapable of encompassing any other forms:

Molti son di parer, che la favella  
 Thosca sol in mostrar d'amor gli affetti  
 Basti, et sia dolce al par d'ogn'altra, et bella.  
 Ma ch'a voler cantar gli alti soggetti  
 Del fiero Marte al segno non arriva  
 Sian quanto voglian gli scrittori eletti.<sup>20</sup>

This argument follows similar reasoning seen previously, specifically that of scepticism regarding traditional love poetry that can be seen as early as Trissino and Alamanni. Speroni had likewise condemned prevailing contemporary tendencies to imitate solely Petrarchan love poetry without exploring other forms. Thus, from Alamanni to Bolognetti, we can trace a clear line of reasoning—beginning even in the early sixteenth century—that traditional vernacular poetic forms, despite their popularity and authority, represent an insufficient or inferior type of literature that ought to be overcome. Within this perspective, we also find continuing references to the nature of the vernacular language as predominantly (and problematically) sweet and pleasing, a description that Bolognetti also includes in these lines (“dolce ... e bella”). The guiding motivation behind these characterizations of the vernacular as merely “sweet” or “pretty” is the continually frustrated desire to move beyond a clear horizon of limited expressive possibilities.

For Bolognetti, as for the majority of the authors under consideration, the problem of pushing the envelope lies with addressing the problem of poetic custom and linguistic usage. According to Bolognetti, the vernacular language is itself capable of adequately expressing any subject matter. Indeed, he writes, early vernacular poets had produced a perfect language (“a sua perfettion già manca nulla”).<sup>21</sup> As a result, the vernacular is

<sup>19</sup> *Capitoli*, pg. 148, vv.10-15.

<sup>20</sup> *Capitoli*, pg. 148, vv. 16-24.

<sup>21</sup> *Capitoli*, pg. 148, v. 33.

already capable of expressing a wide range of genres, from epic to pastoral (“Concorde al suon di tromba, o di Siringa”).<sup>22</sup> He declares that an Italian poet should therefore be capable of singing of more than interior amorous emotional states (“gli interni affetti”).

Bolognetti also openly despairs at the perceived lack of a true epic poem in the vernacular, despite the apparent possibility for such poetry. Indeed, he claims that the thought of the “perfect” Tuscan language lacking an epic poem keeps him awake at night:

Tra me la notte, e il dì dunque pensando  
Quanto la Thosca lingua sia perfetta, [...]  
Et molta meraviglia hebbi io,  
C’Heroicamente a dir nessun si metta.<sup>23</sup>

Most likely this description is a fine piece of rhetoric rather than an accurate description of Bolognetti’s psychological fragility. Yet it is worth noting that this same concern echoes the same remarks made in Bernardino Daniello’s dialogue *Della poetica* printed twenty years earlier: “insino a qui niuno si vede avere scritto poema il quale dirittamente si possa eroico chiamare.”<sup>24</sup> It is important to emphasize the situations in which these two writers find themselves. Daniello is participating in the debate over the language question; that is, not only the identity of the vernacular, but whether or not it is a legitimate medium of high cultural expression. By Bolognetti’s time, the issue of the legitimacy of the vernacular has been essentially resolved. The vernacular is not only a proper medium, but it is even to be preferred to classical languages. As a result, his surprise concerning the continued lack of a successful vernacular epic points to a growing frustration with the current state of literary affairs. It is in this period of frustration that both Bolognetti and Giraldi—and Bernardo and Pigna—all begin their poems.

Giraldi responded to Bolognetti’s poem with a *capitolo* of his own, where he not only complains of the difficulty of the task, but echoes the same dissatisfaction with the state of things. The exact date of this *capitolo* is unclear, although it was included, along with Bolognetti’s original *capitolo*, at the end of the *Ercole*, printed in 1557.<sup>25</sup> Giraldi claims that he has been working on the *Ercole* for three years, but he is afraid that he has taken on an impossible task (a “troppo sottile e troppo alto lavoro”).<sup>26</sup> Despite the apparent greatness

<sup>22</sup> *Capitoli*, pg. 148, v. 35. Bolognetti even asks: what other language is so suitable for also singing of shepherds and war? (“Pan, di Cerere, e di Marte / L’arme, l’aratro, et l’humil greggia errante?”) *Capitoli*, pg. 149, vv. 41-42.

<sup>23</sup> *Capitoli*, pg. 149, vv. 52-53; 56-57.

<sup>24</sup> Bernard Weinberg (1970). *Trattati di poetica e retorica del Cinquecento*. Vol. 2. Bari: Laterza, pg. 314.

<sup>25</sup> See *Capitoli*, pp. 189-192.

<sup>26</sup> *Capitolo*, pg. 189, v. 10.

of the vernacular language—which excels over any other of the modern languages—, Giraldi expresses dismay about his own work:

Ch'ancor che questa lingua ogn'altra eccella,  
 Eran le rime, e i miei versi inetti  
 A tal materia, e mel mostrò ben ella.<sup>27</sup>

Giraldi returns to the same rhetorically-inflected issue seen in the previous decades, that of linguistic suitability. His concern revolves around the problem of whether or not his specific use of language is appropriate for the subject matter.

He thus exhorts Bolognetti to continue his work on the *Costante*, thereby proving to the world that Tuscan can express any topic:

Lasciar la bella impresa non dovete,  
 Ma dare al mondo manifesto pegno,  
 Ch'atto a illustrar la nostra lingua sete.  
 Et c'huomo alcun non ha sì alto disegno,  
 Che nol possa il Thoscan con eccellenza  
 Spiegare in stil non del soggetto indegno.<sup>28</sup>

As with the statement about his own *Ercole*, Giraldi describes the expression of subject matter (“tal materia” | “soggetto”) in terms of suitability (“inetti” | “atto”).

In the *capitolo*, Giraldi seems largely to have shifted away from the problem of narrative structure seen in his other works towards a more general concern with language and style. Indeed, he goes on to criticize recent detractors of the vernacular, those who “hold the language in contempt” (“[i]n dispregio habbia, e tenga per negletto | Questo Idioma”).<sup>29</sup> Such contempt appears to derive from Giraldi’s belief that poets have begun to adopt words from other languages. Instead, Giraldi insists that there is no need to look elsewhere for assistance in elevating the vernacular to the subject matter of epic:

Cerchi, chi vuol cercar lo stile altrove,  
 Contento i’ son, che il dir Thoscan mi guide  
 Che mi par che il miglior non si ritrove.<sup>30</sup>

It is possible that Giraldi has in mind the attempts to introduce foreign words into the vernacular that we saw come under attack in Pigna’s discussion of romance and epic. There, Pigna insists that epic poetry should not resort to importing words from “beyond the Alps.” Indeed, it seems that there is a broader reaction, at least on the part of two Ferrarese intellectuals, against a contemporary tendency to appropriate foreign words.

<sup>27</sup> *Capitoli*, pg. 189, vv. 16-18.

<sup>28</sup> *Capitoli*, pg. 191 vv. 91-96.

<sup>29</sup> *Capitoli*, pg. 191, vv. 100-101.

<sup>30</sup> *Capitoli*, pg. 191, vv. 103-105.

It also possible that Giraldi is specifically referring to the use of Latinisms or Greek neologisms, as he immediately goes on to elevate the vernacular, a living language, against classical—that is, dead—languages.

Et se il Latin, e il Greco ben si ride  
 Et dica che pres'ho le strade torte,  
 Et che dal vero il falso mi divide,  
 Io fermo stò, nel mio parere, e forte;  
 Et biasmo questo, e quel che si rinforza  
 La viva estinguer per le lingue morte.<sup>31</sup>

With the exchange between Bolognetti and Giraldi we have the continual assertion of the literary strengths of the vernacular and its ability to treat epic themes, despite the lack of a successful poem. Both also express doubts about their own projects, although such humility may be more of a rhetorical strategy more than actual reservations.<sup>32</sup> They both take aim at contemporary opinions concerning the perceived shortcomings of the vernacular (it can only treat love poetry, it needs to borrow from other languages), as well as the prevalence of romances, which seem to contribute to a certain view of the limited options for future epic poets.

Three main points emerge in this exchange that will continue to appear throughout Bolognetti's later exchanges with other writers. First, there is an expressed confidence in the vernacular. As a result, the language is already well equipped to treat any subject matter. Second, Bolognetti is frustrated with traditional—though widely popular—vernacular forms, namely romance. Lastly, despite his assurance that the vernacular is capable of addressing any subject, Bolognetti is nevertheless concerned about his own epic style. In other words, there appears to be a distinct gap between an idealization of the vernacular and the actual practice of composing an epic, a gap which is further complicated by the ubiquity of romance, whose style seems detrimental to any future epic project.

### 6.1.3 *Against the People*

Such disdain concerning romance takes on a new, much more polemical tone in Bolognetti's epistolary exchanges in the early 1560s. Beginning in 1560, he asks several important figures to read drafts of his epic and provide him with feedback. The two most important intellectuals are Sperone Speroni and Annibale Caro, both living in Rome in the

<sup>31</sup> *Capitoli*, pg. 191, vv. 100-111.

<sup>32</sup> Of course, it is worth bearing in mind that both poets never printed their full poems.

first half of the decade.<sup>33</sup> Bolognetti sends both men various letters and *capitoli* concerning the revision of his poem. Through these texts, we gain a clearer image of Bolognetti as a wealthy and erudite poet who, despite his growing disdain for popular literary forms, seems uncertain about the linguistic form of his own poem.

In a *capitolo* to Caro, from sometime in 1562, Bolognetti offers a portrait of himself as primarily a bureaucrat dedicated to civic administrative duties, which are continually interrupting his desire to compose poetry. In fact, he frequently mentions his attempts to write poetry, only to be interrupted by the banal requests or the irrelevant crises of some citizen.

S'io passeggio talhor sotto la loggia,  
 Pensando a quel concetto c'ho in pensiero  
 Per vestirlo con nova et vaga foggia,  
 Mi vien subito detto: il cancelliero  
 Ha condotto prigion vostro compadre.<sup>34</sup>

Elsewhere, Bolognetti comments that, even when conversing with friends, he is constantly interrupted by some trivial matter:

Se col Morello, o con l'Harmodia parlo,  
 Et d'un soggetto a lor cheggio consiglio,  
 Come esprimerlo ben, come adornarlo,  
 M'è detto haver la febbre un picciol figlio.<sup>35</sup>

Bolognetti's position is thus radically different from several of the other poets we have seen so far. He composes poetry during moments of aristocratic leisure, rather than as requests from a patron. Unlike Bernardo Tasso, or even intellectuals like Pigna and Giralaldi, Bolognetti does not seem particularly worried about completing a work for some patron who provides him with a stipend. Instead, Bolognetti is an erudite—although perhaps amateur—poet who would prefer to immerse himself in an idealized intellectual community of other writers.

Bolognetti's clear attempt to distance himself from the issues of daily life leads to two important points. First, there is a constant anxiety concerning his style, that is, the proper

33 Although we will not discuss Annibale Caro, it is important to note his position within the growing concern for developing the vernacular in order to compete with both classical languages and other contemporary European ones. He personally worked on a *verso sciolto* translation of the *Aeneid* in the early 1560s. Defending his translation in a letter to Giovanni Andrea Dell'Anguillara from 1565, Caro writes that he is trying to "far prova di questa lingua con la latina." He goes on to state: "So che fo cosa di poca lode traducendo d'una lingua in un'altra; ma io non ho per fine d'esserne lodato, ma solo di far conoscere (se mi verrà fatto) la ricchezza e la capacità di questa lingua contro l'opinione di quelli che asseriscono che non può avere poema epico: né arte né voci da esplicare conetti poetici: che non sono poche che lo credono." Found in A. Caro, *Delle lettere familiari*. Padova, per Giuseppe Comino, 1727, II, n. 247.

34 *Capitoli*, pg 73, vv. 181-185.

35 *Capitoli*, pg. 73, vv. 93-196.

way of “adorning” or “expressing” a concept, hopefully in a new and pleasing shape (“con nova et vaga foggia”). Second, there is a growing disdain for the masses, which is expressed not only in his tone regarding his administrative office. Though his tone is largely ironic in this *capitolo*, in his later comments, Bolognetti eventually expresses open disdain for the “popular” audience of masses.

Indeed, these two points become clearer when Bolognetti defends the subject matter of the *Costante*, which was viewed as overly recondite in nature. In a letter to Caro dated October 12th, 1562, Bolognetti discusses the feedback he received from both Caro and Speroni, emphasizing the validity of his obscure subject matter.<sup>36</sup> Much of this letter is a defense of his chosen historical topic, namely the story of the relatively unknown Roman prefect Ceionius Albinus, who set out on a mission to free the captured emperor Valerian. This story does not appear in any of the major classical historians, such as Livy, and Bolognetti only found him mentioned in several recently rediscovered Greek historical sources. In other words, Bolognetti chose as the historical subject of his epic a protagonist and a narrative that was essentially unknown to most people, including well-educated intellectuals. It is clear in his response that Bolognetti’s reviewers found the subject matter particularly obscure.<sup>37</sup> In a 1566 letter to Bolognetti, Girolamo Muzio describes the issue: “per esser la materia di cose non comuni anzi recondite, et che per la difficile cognitione delle historie di que’ tempi a pena sono in notitia de’ letterati, la mia opinione è che non aggradirà al popolo, ed i dotti attendono ad altre letture.”<sup>38</sup>

In a later *capitolo* to Speroni, most likely written in 1565, Bolognetti continues to defend the subject of his poem, while also exhorting his reviewers to help him develop the style of the poem.<sup>39</sup> This letter repeats the two main points seen earlier in the exchange with Giraldi: namely, the maturity of the vernacular language, and the necessity of reforming epic poetry by distancing oneself from the Ariostan model. Bolognetti’s plan is to challenge those detractors who do not believe that a vernacular poet could not “dar fiato a la tromba di Marte,” being restricted to “hor la lira hor la cetra hor la siringa.”<sup>40</sup> In fact,

<sup>36</sup> For a description of this letter, see *Capitoli*, pp. 42-52.

<sup>37</sup> The obscurity of Bolognetti’s subject matter is repeated in a defense of the *Costante*, which we will analyze shortly, where the Genovese intellectual Marc’Antonio Tritonio responds to the accusation that Bolognetti’s subject is “nuovo e astruso.” See *Capitoli*, pg. 55.

<sup>38</sup> The letter is dated September 13th, 1566. The integral text can be found in *Capitoli*, pg. 179.

<sup>39</sup> The *capitolo* seems to have been written originally to Felice Gualteri, to whom Bolognetti had sent sections of his poem. We do not have the initial reactions from Bolognetti’s Roman revisers. Given that Bolognetti mentions the death of his wife, which occurred in 1565, the text was doubtlessly composed afterwards, though not before 1566. The *capitolo* was also sent after the initial publication of the first eight books, although before Speroni’s specific comments sent to Bolognetti around 1567. See *Capitoli*, pp. 79ff.

<sup>40</sup> *Capitoli*, pg. 103, vv. 39-40.



Bolognetti's defense of his subject matter involves primarily attacking chivalric romance, which offers nothing but "shadows" ("ombr[e]") and "frivolous adventures" ("vane imprese").

According to Bolognetti, many writers and readers—even those who are supposedly educated—have unfortunately, become infatuated with this type of poetry:

Molti, non so veder con quai ragioni  
 Lasciando il vicin corpo, l'ombra vanno  
 Cercando per lontane regioni;  
 Non fate adunque voi come quei fanno  
 Benche sian dotti e d'eloquenza immensa,  
 Ch'Arli, et Parigi abbandonar non sanno.  
 D'Artù, con gli altri erranti della mensa  
 Rotonda sol dirò, ch'ivi ne pane,  
 Ne ben condito cibo si dispensa.<sup>41</sup>

For Bolognetti, the irresistible charm of romance, specifically Carolingian and Arthurian romance, has ensnared the intelligent readers of Italy. Instead, he will address the "great undertakings" of the Roman empire ("imprese alte Romane"), which are founded on the "truth" ("[il] vero").

Tempering somewhat his animosity towards romance, Bolognetti also emphasizes that, if a reader is looking for certain Ariostan character types, they can also be found in his poem: "Se Ruggier, Mandricardo, Rodomonte | Cercate; ecco Anchelao, Craterio, Eumene."<sup>42</sup> Bolognetti offers a large number of examples of characters in his work which are analogous to those found in chivalric romance. As a result, despite his constant insistence on generic division between romance and epic, Bolognetti still attempts to circumscribe his narrative choices within certain literary customs and expectations.

Despite his overall confidence with the subject matter, Bolognetti appears most anxious about his use of language. In fact, in his *capitolo* to Speroni, he frequently moves between the self-assurance of the veracity of his imperial epic and the need for his revisers to help him improve the language:

Chi pascersi mai più vorrà di ghiande,  
 Trovato essendo il grano al tempo nostro,  
 Con tante saporite altre vivande.  
 Trovato il tesser d'oro, e 'l tinger d'ostro  
 Disdice il bigio, a gran donna, et gentile,

<sup>41</sup> *Capitoli*, pg. 106, vv. 91-99. Bolognetti also tells Speroni to follow Virgil and Homer, rather than "Chi cantò Drusian, Rovenza, Ancroia | Lasciando quei, cui tanto il mondo stima." See *ibid.*, pg. 109, vv. 155-156.

<sup>42</sup> *Capitoli*, pg. 109, vv. 142-43.

Costante adunque ornate homai col vostro  
Puro leggiardo, et ben purgato stile.<sup>43</sup>

Once more the word “style” (“stile”) returns as a primary issue. It is clear that erudition, a recondite subject matter, and vaguely Ariostan character types are no guarantee for success, as the examples of Trissino and Alamanni made clear.

Indeed, the *capitolo* itself is a request for Speroni and Caro to focus almost exclusively on linguistic and stylistic problems:

Io sò ch'avete in Roma il mio Costante  
Visto col Caro, et so che riuscito  
Non v'è quel che pareva forse al sembiante.  
Non sol non hebbi mai pensier l'estrema  
Lima d'imporgli; ma l'opra lasciando  
Rozza imperfetto, et d'ornamento scema  
Far volsi un model picciolo sperando  
Che altri erga poi tanto edificio in duro  
Marmo la molle mia cera cangiando.<sup>44</sup>

Although he phrases the problem as a minor issue of “smoothing” the poem (“l'estrema l lima”) and adding “ornamentation” (“ornamento”), Bolognetti's primary concern lies entirely with the style of his poem.

Bolognetti's anxiety about his own poetic language also underlies his general frustration with romance. His growing disdain for the genre becomes associated with the lower language of the “popular” reader. Sometime in 1566, he wrote a letter to Giovan Battista Morello, the same poet mentioned in the *capitolo* to Caro in which Bolognetti was seeking help with his style.<sup>45</sup> In his letter, Bolognetti describes his intention to deviate from the “plebeian” language of common readers:

Scrivendo ai dotti havea volto il pensiero  
Sprezzando et Sarti, et fabri, e l'altra plebe;  
Et tra la plebe in mio linguaggio chiudo  
Quel che non sa ne di saper si cura.<sup>46</sup>

Bolognetti's references are quite specific, and he specifies tailors and blacksmiths as comprising the audience of romance. It seems that, by the mid 1560s, chivalric romance has

<sup>43</sup> *Capitoli*, pg.109-110, vv. 166-172.

<sup>44</sup> *Capitoli*, pg. 104, vv. 16-24.

<sup>45</sup> See above, where Bolognetti describes asking for Morello's advice on taking a concept and needing to “esprimerlo ben” and “adornarlo.” The letter to Morello, which exists only in manuscript, is conserved at the Biblioteca Corsiniana, Cors.LI2, cc. 3v-18v. I have not seen this letter, though Mancini cites it in *Capitoli*, pg. 27, n. 43.

<sup>46</sup> *Capitoli*, pg. 59, n. 26, vv. 491-494.

become inferior not merely because of its form, but more specifically due to its association with a lower, “commoner” class. Thus the people that Bolognetti helps as politician and administrator are not the same social group to whom he has any interest directing his poetry. They enjoy romances, and Ariosto, but a true epic poem must be sought that lies outside of their sphere of cultural literacy.<sup>47</sup> For intellectual and aristocratic poets like Bolognetti, there is a growing distance between the taste of the “common people” and the intellectually (and ideologically) distinct world of epic poetry.<sup>48</sup>

#### 6.1.4 *The Ghost of verso sciolto*

This growing distance between the two forms also translates into discussions of meter. Although Bolognetti eventually wrote his *Costante* in *ottava rima*, he had originally planned to write it in *verso sciolto*. The difference between these two forms of meter was a topic of discussion in an exchange of letters with Girolamo Muzio, the same writer who extolled *verso sciolto* in his *Arte poetica* (1551). Although we do not have any of Bolognetti’s earlier letters in their discussion, in a letter from September 13th, 1561, Muzio expresses his disappointment in Bolognetti’s use of *ottava*: “Non entrai a dir mia opinione tra le stanze et le rime sciolte, non istimando che mi accadesse, havendomi ella scritto che era risoluta di scrivere in rime sciolte.”<sup>49</sup> In other words, Bolognetti had originally told Muzio that he intended to write in blank verse, although he changed his mind at a certain point. Much like Alamanni, Bernardo, and various other poets, Bolognetti felt that the meter of the *Furioso* was the only means of achieving any lasting literary success.

Although the *Costante* remained in *ottava rima*, Bolognetti continued to struggle with the issue of a properly “epic” meter throughout the 1560s and well into the 1570s. In the late 1560s, he composed a hagiographical epic on the life of Thomas Aquinas. In the dedicatory letter to Gabriele Paleotti, dated February 25th 1570, Bolognetti explains that he decided to use *verso sciolto*, despite the overwhelming preference for *ottave*. The basis of

<sup>47</sup> We also find a similar sentiment in Antonio Minturno’s *Arte poetica* (1563), where the author writes that the subject matter of the *Furioso* was worthy of epic treatment, but Ariosto preferred to follow Spanish and French barbarians and write for the masses, i.e. “gli huomini volgari, che non sanno, che cosa è la Poesia.” For Minturno, Ariosto was an excellent poet, but he was only interested in success, thus “per piacere a molti elesse di seguire l’abuso, che ne’ Romanzi trovava.” See *Capitoli*, pg. 59, n. 26. See *L’Arte poetica del Sig. Antonio Minturno, etc.* Venice: Andrea Valvassori, 1563, pp. 28-29.

<sup>48</sup> Such a division also seems inherent in Pigna’s refusal to look to specifically French and Spanish languages for help in elevating his own vernacular. In other words, it seems that the division between epic and romance has shifted from rather pedantic concerns about narrative unity towards a more ideologically-oriented refusal of the more “popular” (and more foreign) form.

<sup>49</sup> *Capitoli*, pg. 178.

his preference relies on the same justification seen everywhere throughout the sixteenth century: rhyme eliminates the sense of *gravitas*:

Io mi sono risoluto di usar più tosto il verso sciolto che le rime, sì perché mi pare che questa sorte di verso apporti maggior gravità alle composizioni che non fanno le rime, sì anco per seguir l'autorità del Trissino, del Caro, del Muzio e di molti altri grandi dell'età nostra, i quali vogliono che l'eroico di questa lingua sia il verso sciolto. Ma perché molti altri ancora sono stati e sono di opinion contraria, sia come si voglia, io ho fatto ancora scelta di questo verso, per condur più tosto la cosa a fine.<sup>50</sup>

Bolognetti's defense of *verso sciolto* is based on two points: an aesthetic justification in the name of *gravitas* and an appeal certain intellectual authorities, such as Trissino, Caro, and Muzio. Thus, Bolognetti suggests, despite Trissino's artistic failure, his larger theoretical point remains valid.<sup>51</sup>

As for Caro and Muzio, Bolognetti remained in contact with both intellectuals for much of his life. Indeed, his doubts concerning epic meter appear to emerge largely from his interaction with them. In a letter to Domenico Venier, dated January 25th 1568, Bolognetti describes his recent decision to compose a new epic poem celebrating the founding of Venice by the mythical hero Antenore.<sup>52</sup> Despite his confidence in the subject matter, Bolognetti has been debating whether or not to use *ottava rima* or *verso sciolto*. He prefers to use the latter, following the suggestions of both Muzio and Caro, who had recently composed a translation in *verso sciolto* of the *Aeneid* between 1563 and 1566.

Yet this letter is of interest not only because it traces a line of thinking about *verso sciolto*, but also because Bolognetti does not merely ask Venier his opinion on the matter. Instead, he sends two versions of the opening of the poem, one in *ottave* and the other in *verso sciolto*:

Tal che ritrovandomi apparecchiato alcuni mesi sono io mi diedi a fare il principio, et così feci alcune stanze; ma sapendo esser opinione di molti, che il verso sciolto sia più atto al poema heroico, che qual si voglia sorte di rima, mi risolsi di domandare il parer loro ad alcuni di questi grandi della nostra età, i quali per la maggior parte m'hanno confermato il medesimo, e in specie il Caro, il Mutio, del giudicio de' quali faccio grandissima stima. Per questa

<sup>50</sup> *Capitoli*, pg. 64.

<sup>51</sup> Regardless of this clear statement about his preferences, Bolognetti will shift back to *ottava rima* in his last major poem, the *Christiana vittoria marittima*, celebrating the victorious maritime battle of Lepanto in 1571. In the poem, published in 1572, Bolognetti employs *ottava rima*, and the prefatory letter offers no explanation of his decision. It seems that, by the end of his life, Bolognetti had not yet resolved the question that had been plaguing thinkers and poets for the past four decades.

<sup>52</sup> Venier was at the center of a group of Venetian intellectuals, including Giulio Contarini, Giorgio Gradenigo, Girolamo Molin, Lodovico Dolce, Erasmo di Valvasor, Sperone, and even Bernardo Tasso at one point. His influence on discussions of meter should be explored more fully.

cagione adunque io ho fatto il medesimo principio in versi sciolti, et mi sono risoluto di mandare a V.S. et l'uno, et l'altro; pregandola a volermene dire il parer suo; il qual parere ha da essere accettato da me per sententia difinitiva, dalla quale non si appellarà in conto alcuno.<sup>53</sup>

This request is significant for two main reasons: first, by this point in the late 1560s, the previously numerous options for composing an epic poem have been reduced to two: *ottava rima* and *verso sciolto*. Bolognetti has completely eliminated any consideration of *terza rima* or other kinds of metrical experimentation (such as Tolomei or Patrizi). Second, this is one of the only extant examples of a poet attempting to choose between possible forms by writing the same subject matter in two versions. These two versions offer us a clearer example of poetic practice when confronted with different formal solutions.

Although we will not examine them in detail, let us look at the opening lines of both versions of the poem:

Quel grande heroe Troian d'alti consigli  
Adorno, et d'alta providenza io canto,  
Che dei Greci fuggendo i crudi artigli  
lasciato Antandro, e il Simoenta, e il Xantho,  
Tre lustri havendo in mar la moglie e i figli  
Saldo schermo pur contra gli Austri tanto,  
Ch'ei scorto al fin de la gran matre Diva  
D'Adria salvo arrivò sopra la riva.<sup>54</sup>

The same eight lines are expanded substantially in *verso sciolto*:

Quel grande heroe Troian d'alta prudenza  
Adorno io canto, et di consiglio vero  
Ch'arsa la patria sua vista, et distrutta  
Lasciato Antrandro, e il Simoenta, e il Zanto  
Con la moglie, et co i figli, et co i nepoti  
Di Phrigii Heroi con numerata schiera  
Et con gran parte degli Dei di Troia.  
Tre lustri interi da l'incendio, ond'ella  
Porgendo altrui pietà misera giacque,  
Errò per onde, et sciti, et scogli sempre  
Agitato da venti, e da procelle.  
Ma superato pur destin si forte  
Con mente ferma, et con invitto core  
Da Bezcinechia, di cui nacque, scorta  
D'Adria salvo arrivò sopra la riva.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>53</sup> This letter, along with the following citations from Bolognetti's drafts in *verso sciolto* and *ottava rima*, can both be found at the Biblioteca Corsiniana, MS 32 (A 20). This letter is found on cc. 186r-187r.

<sup>54</sup> Bibl. Cors. MS 32 (A 20), c. 187r.

<sup>55</sup> Bibl. Cors. MS 32 (A 20), c. 190r.

Contrary to what one might expect, the version in *verso sciolto* makes use of much more space to address the same subject matter.<sup>56</sup> The syntactical period is much longer, and there are more details which would have interrupted the rhythm of the *ottava*. For example, in the *ottava* version, Bolognetti writes of Antenor's sea voyage with his "wife and children" ("la moglie e i figli"), while in the *verso sciolto* rendition, he includes a more extended family: "co la moglie, et co i figli, et co i nepoti." Although much of the language is shared between both versions, the *verso sciolto* version elaborates substantially on details, resulting in a winding syntax.

To recapitulate, the exchanges between Bolognetti and other writers help us understand the various attempts to formulate epic poetry in terms of language and style. By mid-century, there is a general acceptance of the formal and generic possibilities of the vernacular, yet there still lacks a successful instance of the highest form of poetic expression as set by classical literature, that of epic poetry. The main obstacle appears to be romance, which has produced a seemingly narrow literary sensibility. Such widespread preference for this form has thus forestalled attempts, mainly by more intellectual and classicizing writers, to expand the literary canon.

Romance then becomes, despite the contributions of Fornari, Giraldi, and Pigna, a target for poets such as Bolognetti, who begin to associate the form not only with issues of truth and falsehood, but also a lower and somehow less "legitimate" cultural space. For Bolognetti, the response is to produce an epic grounded in Christian and imperial historical truth, even if the topic is recondite and obscure. He is less certain, however, about the use of language. He constantly seeks assistance on questions of style from his immediate friends in Bologna, as well as from his revisers, such as Speroni, Caro, and Muzio. These problems of style are also related to a more serious uncertainty concerning meter, which remains unresolved for Bolognetti through all of his attempts at narrative "heroic" poems. The main issue again seems to be the perceived—that is, aesthetic, aural, phonic—qualities of epic language itself. Let us turn to the example of his *Costante*, or more specifically the critical response to the poem, where we can see more clearly issues of language and style.

<sup>56</sup> Luciana Borsetti explores this relationship between *verso sciolto* and *ottava*, and the relative differences in length, by looking at the translations into both meters by Lodovico Dolce and Annibale Caro. See Luciana Borsetti (1982). «Tra normalizzazione e sperimentazione: appunti sulla questione del verso.» In: *Quasi un picciolo mondo. Tentativi di codificazione del genere epico nel Cinquecento*. Ed. by Guido Baldassarri. Milan: Edizioni Unicopli Milano, pp. 91–127.

## 6.2 CONTROVERSIES OVER BOLOGNETTI'S EPIC

While we do not have much evidence of readers responding to the works of Giraldi and Pigna, Bolognetti's poem, perhaps due to its lengthy period of revision, generated a relatively large amount of critical response. Of the people to whom Bolognetti sent a copy of his work for feedback, we have responses from Bernardo Tasso, Muzio, and Sperone. There also exists a defense of Bolognetti's poem, entitled *Discorso sopra il Costante*, written by the Genovese intellectual Marcantonio Tritonio. This latter text will prove to be crucial for reconstructing the concerns of Bolognetti's first readers, in particular their criticisms of the language of the poem. As we have seen, Bolognetti frequently expresses anxiety concerning the linguistic form of his poem.

## 6.2.1 Speroni and the Art of Pedantry

As we have already seen, Bolognetti's correspondence with Muzio primarily involves the issue of metrical choice, with an emphasis on using *verso sciolto*. With Bernardo and Speroni, however, the principal matter of concern is Bolognetti's style.

Let us begin with Bernardo, whose frequent letters to Bolognetti in the mid 1560's demonstrate a close friendship between the two poets.<sup>57</sup> For instance, in a letter from January, 1565, Bernardo offers both praise and criticism of the *Costante*.<sup>58</sup> According to Bernardo, in terms of disposition and invention, Bolognetti has perfectly followed classical models.

Yet, regarding style and language, Bernardo feels that there is need of revision: "circa lo stile e l'elocuzione, ne la quale per avventura avete più bisogna di consiglio, vi potrei dir alcuna cosa."<sup>59</sup> Though he does not go into any further details, he does mention that he enjoys Bolognetti's avoidance of certain poetic tendencies introduced by Ariosto, which he himself had been unable to avoid: "Mi piace oltre modo che V.S. abbia fuggiti quelli scogli i quali, per compiacere a l'abuso introdotto da l'Ariosto nel mondo, non ho io saputo

<sup>57</sup> In a letter from Bernardo to Bolognetti, August 6, 1565, he complains that he has not had a chance to read the entire *Costante* because he lent it to Torquato, who himself lent it to other people. See *Lettere inedite di Bernardo Tasso*, ed. G. Campori, Bologna: Gaetano Romagnoli, 1869, pg. 207. For more on Muzio and Speroni's criticism of Bolognetti's poem see A. Fano, "Bricicche cinquecentesche. Il "Costante" di F. Bolognetti e le critiche di G. Muzio e S. Speroni." In: *Atti e memorie della R. Accademia di scienze, lettere, ed arti di Padova*, 370, 1910-11, pp. 31-49.

<sup>58</sup> Bernardo's letter can be found in *Lettere inedite*, pp. 209-212.

<sup>59</sup> *Lettere inedite*, pg. 210.

fuggire.”<sup>60</sup> Despite the indeterminate nature of Ariosto's “abuso,” Bernardo's statement once again confirms that Bolognetti was frequently seen as a poet capable of moving past the poetic tendencies of Ariostan romance.

In another next letter, Bernardo continues to praise the poem, claiming that, in general, the work is “grave” and contains the majesty of ancient poets (“quella maestà de' poeti antiqui”).<sup>61</sup> He repeats his earlier point about issues of style, which seems to fail to meet the principle of decorum. Once again, Bernardo does not offer any specific points, claiming that Bolognetti will understand the particulars: “Circa lo stile e la locuzione dirò che [...] lo stile non serva quella equalità, considerata la varietà de le materie, che potrebbe e dovrebbe avere.”<sup>62</sup> There is thus a similar concern connecting Bernardo's friendly letters and Bolognetti's own anxiety concerning style as seen in his correspondence with Speroni and Caro from this same period.

Although we do not know the entirety of the critiques made by his revisers, we do have a letter from Speroni to Bolognetti from April 1567. Addressing only the first book of Bolognetti's poem, Speroni's letter criticizes the smallest details in terms of narrative continuity, verisimilitude, style, and meter. He begins by recommending a complete reorganization of the plot, offering his own version of the narrative, written in prose, of the same events of the *Costante*. He further criticizes Bolognetti's language, enumerating a long list of stanzas and lines from the first canto which he does not enjoy. For most of these lines, Speroni simply claims that he does not like the language. For instance: “Nella 31. non piace nè il quinto, nè il settimo verso. nella 32. il sesto. La 34. contradice alla 32.”<sup>63</sup> Despite this largely unorganized mass of pedantry, there seem to be several tendencies in Speroni's criticism.<sup>64</sup> He frequently stresses avoiding the repetition of words (“Nella quarta restò due volte non piace”). He also stresses avoiding “common” manners of speech (“Le due prime stanze sono molto volgari, specialmente il quarto e sesto della prima” (526)). Lastly, he frequently suggests more proper choices for words given certain situations (“non direi il Tevere *inondare* i sette colli, *bagnar* sì bene”). Despite taking examples from only the first book, Speroni does claim that these stylistic examples should apply to the rest of the work: “Queste parole illumineranno mirabilmente tutto 'l poema per se oscuro.”<sup>65</sup>

<sup>60</sup> *Lettere inedite*, pg. 211.

<sup>61</sup> *Lettere inedite*, pg. 213

<sup>62</sup> *Lettere inedite*, pg. 213

<sup>63</sup> Sperone Speroni (1740). *Opere*. Ed. by N. Delle Laste and M. Forcellini. Vol. 5 vols. Venice: Domenico Occhi, V, pg. 526.

<sup>64</sup> Mancini offers a longer analysis of Speroni's criticisms in *Capitoli*, pg. 95.

<sup>65</sup> Speroni, *Opere*, V, pg. 528.



Although Speroni's general preferences for poetic language can only be extracted from the mass of details he offers, his position on prosody is much clearer. Indeed, Speroni seems to accept the fact of *ottava rima* without making any reference to the metrical scheme. Instead, Speroni is much more critical of Bolognetti's rhythmical tendencies when composing hendecasyllables. He begins by pointing out the "bad rhythms" ("numeri pessimi delli quali abbondate") found throughout the first canto of the *Costante*. According to Speroni, Bolognetti's inability to construct a well-regulated prosody comes from the fact that his ears are "full of Ariosto's rhythms" ("piene le orecchie de' numeri dell'Ariosto").<sup>66</sup> As a result, he claims, the *Costante* contains a large number of hendecasyllable lines in which the fourth syllable receives primary stress.

In Speroni's view, such a placement produces an effective pause early in the line, thereby forcing a reader to hurry to the end of the verse: "son que' versi, che si riposano di qua dal mezzo del cammino; poi bisogna correre al fine; voglio dire che si riposano sulla quarta sillaba."<sup>67</sup> Speroni lists about twenty-four lines from the first canto that contain this particular prosodic structure. According to Speroni, the primary stress in a verse pause should never occur before the sixth syllable ("dovrebbero fermarsi non prima che sulla sesta"). In other words, Speroni wants a balanced prosody that allows for the clean division of a line into two balanced hemistichs. He apparently felt so strongly about this point that he repeats his point that Bolognetti should watch for any further imitation of the "vices" of Ariosto: "I quai versi si possono far boni con le medesime parole altrimenti disponendole, guardatevi da questo numero, pessimo vizio preso dall'Ariosto."<sup>68</sup>

In reality, Speroni's condemnation of Ariostan meter echoes his position found years later in a fragment later entitled *Sopra l'Ariosto*.<sup>69</sup> This short critique of Ariosto contains a virtually identical condemnation of Ariosto's prosody, which Speroni describes as frequently "deprived of good rhythm" ("assaisime volte privi di buon numero"). He attributes this vice, once again, to a certain habit of hearing. Ariosto's ears were, like Bolognetti's, simply too used to a given rhythm; in this case, pausing on the fourth syllable:

66 Speroni, *Opere*, V, pg. 528. Mancini writes concerning this criticism, "Anche l'arificio metrico e ritmico deve provvedere supporto alla funzione epica; costituisce per lo Speroni un contrappeso quasi indispensabile, un antidoto per garantirsi dal pericolo di cadere nell'errore irremediabile di una forma dimessa, non conveniente ad una "machina" nel primo grado di nobiltà." See *Capitoli*, pg. 95.

67 Speroni, *Opere*, V, pg. 527.

68 Speroni, *Opere*, V, pg. 527.

69 This fragment probably comes from around 1585. See Mancini's description in *Capitoli*, pg. 95.

e ciò avviene per essere le orecchie sue use a fermarsi in sulla quarta, che non è il mezzo del verso, ma di qua del mezzo; bensì possono migliorare col giudizio di qualche orecchia più regolata nel senso suo.<sup>70</sup>

It is unclear how this view of meter—that is, as well-balanced hemistichs—fits within Speroni's larger views of epic or romance. However, it is quite clear that poets—from Bernardo Tasso to Bolognetti to Torquato Tasso—considered Speroni an authority on such matters and continued to send him material for revision.

Within this largely negative critique of Bolognetti's first canto, there are two important points. First, Speroni is not satisfied with Bolognetti's style, no doubt a disappointing response to his requests for help. Second, the only other negative model mentioned is Ariosto, whose influence seems to have contaminated Bolognetti's poetic senses. For Speroni, the ubiquity of Ariosto has produced a tendency to hear poetry in a certain way, one which is apparently contrary to Speroni's view of a proper epic.

Speroni's frustration with the negative influence Ariosto's poetry extends beyond the conventional notion that Ariosto merely introduced a new way of thinking about narrative structure. Indeed, by now it is clear, from Bolognetti's own exasperation with the comments made by his interlocutors, that the genre of chivalric romance has become inextricably entrenched in the culture. The popularity of the form is not merely that of reciting multiple threads of a storyline, but of writing lines of poetry and using poetic language in a specific way. As a result, it seems that Ariostan romance has resulted in a detrimental effect on both the expectations of the audience and the compositional tendencies of poets. This effect is described largely in terms of sound, as if hearing Ariosto recited or sung too much had produced a literary sensibility incapable of moving in new directions. Out of this particular frustration with Ariosto's influence on poetic craft, we find the clearest attempt to situate Bolognetti's poem against romance in a defense of the work entitled *Discorso sopra il Costante*, published by Marcantonio Tritonio in 1570.

### 6.2.2 Tritonio's Defense of the Costante

Tritonio (1541-1572) was born and studied in Udine before becoming the secretary to a certain Cardinal Cristoforo Madruzzo in Genoa. Little is known of Tritonio's life and works, apart from small pieces of information scattered throughout the prefatory letter of

<sup>70</sup> Speroni, *Opere*, V, pg. 520. In reality, Speroni did not seem particularly fond of Ariosto's poetry. In a letter to Bernardo Tasso from 1559, he writes that Ariosto did construct some interesting plots, but his language was unpleasant, despite his popularity. Speroni concludes that Ariosto "fu anzi oca, che cigno." See, Speroni, *Opere*, V, pg. 69.

his defense of the *Costante*. It seems that Bolognetti had sent a copy of his poem to Cardinal Madruzzo in the mid 1560s, around the same time that he asked the advice of many others.<sup>71</sup> Tritonio, who read the poem with Madruzzo, also became an earlier supporter of Bolognetti's work. Yet, around the mid 1560s, after some negative commentary on the *Costante*, Tritonio drafted his *Discorso* in defense of the work. Thus, though it would not be published until 1570, Tritonio's treatise offers important insight into the continued debate about epic in the early part of the decade.

The treatise itself is divided into two parts. The first is a straightforward defense of Bolognetti's poem as an epic, in direct opposition to Ariostan romance. The second half is a pseudo-dialogue, in which Tritonio narrates a conversation with an unnamed critic of Bolognetti's poem, in which he refutes, point by point, a list of criticisms. In this part of the work, the distinction between romance and epic shifts into the more specific differences between Ariosto and Virgil, the two established representatives of romance and epic. As we shall see, for Tritonio, Bolognetti's importance for vernacular poetry comes from his ability to imitate classical—specifically Virgilian—language in his work. Overall, the treatise offers perhaps the clearest statement on the presumed formal differences between epic and romance, their ideal audiences, and their primary models. In Tritonio's view, as will become clear, epic poetry requires a higher degree of artfulness and poetic ornament, with particular attention paid to the relationship between form and content. Such a position puts him in clear opposition to earlier writers, from Tolomei to Giraldi, who value clarity and simplicity as an aesthetic ideal.

The differences between romance and epic characterize the treatise from its opening pages, where Tritonio begins with a discussion of plot. While epic is found on the "firm foundation" ("fondamento sodo") of historical truth, romance employs a multiplicity of delightful but deceiving fables, which mainly serve as entertainment for the masses, much like a pretty picture:

[i Romanzi] dilettano la plebe con la varietà delle lor machine sconcertate, & pascono tal volta gli occhi di chi gli mira con qualche pittura vaga, ma non satisfano già a gli intendenti, & giudiciosi, uno de' quali ha da esser stimato più che tutto il vulgo.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>71</sup> The widespread dissemination of the work suggests that Bolognetti was engaged in an early modern form of marketing. He clearly saw his work as participating in a larger national debate about vernacular epic poetry, one which was not limited to local modes of entertainment. Clearly more research needs to be done in this regard.

<sup>72</sup> *Discorso di Messer M. Antonio Tritonio sopra il Costante di Messer Francesco Bolognetti*. Bologna: Alessandro Benaci, 1570, c. 3v.

This immediate condemnation leads Tritonio to take up the same preoccupation that has continued to appear throughout all of the authors that we have seen thus far: is it possible to write an epic in the vernacular? To introduce this question, Tritonio relies on the trope of the anonymous detractors of the vernacular:

non mancano di quegli, che si sforzano di persuadere, che la nostra lingua non comporta l'Epopeia, pensando che non si possa continuare una materia con diletto senza scrivere Romanzescamente: alla quale opinione non accade rispondere con molti argomenti, poi che si confonde, & si dilegua da se medesima.<sup>73</sup>

According to Tritonio, certain sceptics feel that writing a continuous narration ("continuare una materia") requires sacrificing pleasure. Such a position echoes the discussion on epic as it was framed in the early decades of the century. Tritonio, however, claims that refuting such a position requires only a few points, which could be summarized as follows: an epic requires a plot based on true subject matter and epic language should be artful and adopt as many different styles as such matter requires.

Tritonio begins by emphasizing the importance of Bolognetti's subject, which sings of the glory of Rome during its initial transition to Christianity. Accordingly, by avoiding the typical Ariostan focus on love and madness, Bolognetti can sing of the piety and splendor of a champion of Rome:

due prime stanza, ove si promette di cantar non la morte di Ruggiero, non gli amori, non i furori d'Orlando; materie forse poco conveniente alla poesia heroica; ma la pietà d'un guerriero splendore, & gloria di Roma, vittorioso di tanti trofei.<sup>74</sup>

Though we will not focus on this aspect of Tritonio's defense of the *Costante*, it is important to highlight the opposition that Tritonio constructs between Ariosto and Virgil, which runs like a red thread through the entire treatise. Not only does it create a conceptual continuity between Virgil's poem and Bolognetti's (i.e. the singing of heroes of war), but it also creates a kind of classical pedigree. Bolognetti's poem can function, in a way, as the sequel to the *Aeneid*, much in the same way that Ariosto followed Boiardo.<sup>75</sup>

Virgil remains likewise important through Tritonio's lengthy disquisition on Bolognetti's epic language. Of particular importance to Tritonio are the imitations of Virgil

<sup>73</sup> *Discorso*, c. 3v.

<sup>74</sup> *Discorso*, c. 4r.

<sup>75</sup> Mancini describes this document as useful for unearthing the debate—not as visible in the printed documents, but found frequently through traces—concerning Aristotle's *Poetics* and Ariostan romance. Mancini refers to a central component within this debate as "la dialettica fra la funzione-Ariosto e la funzione-Virgilio." See *Capitoli*, pg. 53.

in descriptions and comparisons, which are the “most principal ornaments of poetry” (“le quali sono principalissimi ornamenti della poesia”).<sup>76</sup> In fact, Tritonio offers a large number of practical examples of Bolognetti’s successful imitation of Virgil, which he expands by further comparing the “correct” version with similar passages found in Ariosto. For example, Tritonio examines several passages in Virgil, Bolognetti, and Ariosto that deal with storms and tempests. He offers two examples, a stanza from the *Orlando furioso* followed by another from the *Costante*. The first reads:

Hor da fronte, hor da tergo il vento spira,  
Et questo innanzi, & quello adietro caccia;  
Un’altro da traverso il legno aggira,  
Et ciascun pur naufragio li minaccia;  
Quel che siede al governo alto sospira  
Pallido, & sbiggotito nella faccia,  
Et grida in vano, e in van con mano accenna  
Hor di voltare, hor di calar l’antenna.<sup>77</sup>

And the second from the *Costante*:

Scorre, & rimbomba in questa, e in quella parte,  
Soffiando il vento, & l’onda hor gonfia or preme;  
Romper d’antenne, & fracassar di sarte  
Per tutto s’ode, e il mar mormora, & freme;  
Non giova di nocchier la forza, o l’arte,  
Già di scampar ciascun perde la speme,  
Si van d’intorno percotendo l’onde  
E i sassi, & gli antri, & le arenose sponde.<sup>78</sup>

For Tritonio, Bolognetti’s style is much more epic because he uses words such as “rimbomba” to describe the winds, while Ariosto employs unsuitable ones such as “spirare.” According to Tritonio, “spirare” is improper because it is a lyrical term that implies “pleasantness” rather than “fierceness” (“la quale voce *spirare* significa più tosto piacevolezza, che fiera di Vento”).<sup>79</sup> To support his point concerning the overly lyrical nature of Ariosto’s language, Tritonio cites Petrarch’s sonnet “Lasso, quante fiate Amor m’assale” (RVF 109), when the poet also describes the wind using the same verb (“spirare”): “Per far dolce sereno ovunque spira” (v. 11).

Tritonio further claims that Ariosto fails to capture the intensity of the sea as described by various Greek poets, such as Musaeus, Anacreon, and Homer, the latter of which produced vivid images of the “strepito del mare.” Bolognetti, on the other hand, manages to

<sup>76</sup> *Discorso*, c. 10r.

<sup>77</sup> *Discorso*, c. 11v.

<sup>78</sup> *Discorso*, c. 11v.

<sup>79</sup> *Discorso*, c. 11v.

capture “with equal grace” (“con equal grazia”) that same vivid scene: “E il mar mormora, & freme.” Tritonio concludes rather succinctly that Bolognetto’s stanza, in contrast to Ariosto’s attempts to describe the sea, is much more sonorous, serious, and artful: “Se tutte due si pesano con dritta bilancia vedrà, che questa ultima è più sonora, più grave, più artificiosa.”<sup>80</sup> Tritonio’s terminology echoes much of the same language seen previously, notably sonority and *gravitas*. His novelty, however, lies in his emphasis on Bolognetti’s “artifice,” a concept which has been notably absent in most other authors. *As we saw in the last chapter, perhaps only Pigna comes closest to articulating a position on poetry as “arte” rather than “natura.”*

Indeed, such vocabulary extends throughout the entirety of Tritonio’s treatise. For instance, in another comparison between Ariosto and Bolognetti imitating another sea storm in Virgil, Tritonio concludes that the latter’s version is superior in sound (“suono”), since his language conforms more closely to the subject matter:

Senza dubbio questa stanza è di maggior suono, & in certo modo più strepitosa conforme alla materia, & dirà il medesimo ogni uno, che non si lasci reggere dall’affetione.<sup>81</sup>

For Tritonio, Bolognetti’s ability to produce properly “strepitous” sounds demonstrates the ability of vernacular poetry to achieve effects similar to those seen in Latin poetry. As a result of this refined technique, Tritonio claims, it has now become possible for vernacular poets not only to equal, but even surpass ancient writers: “si vedrà che i moderni possono non solamente eguagliare, ma superar gli antichi.”<sup>82</sup>

Such a remarkable statement would doubtless have been impossible thirty years prior. Indeed, the anxiety of earlier writers derived entirely from the problem of imitating formal structures such as meter. Now, it seems, the metrical schemes particular to the vernacular have been firmly established, leaving poets the task of further refining various means of expression, which involves primarily understanding the relationship between language and subject matter. As we have already seen, such expressive “fitness” is a feature of most earlier writers; however, the emphasis has shifted subtly to “style.” The aesthetic effect of language—understood as a function of style—thus becomes a central component to conceptualizing the difference between romance and epic.

Tritonio goes into great detail explaining the different stylistic levels found in the *Costante*, all of which signal a careful attention on Bolognetti’s part to the relationship

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<sup>80</sup> *Discorso*, c. 12r.

<sup>81</sup> *Discorso*, c. 12r.

<sup>82</sup> *Discorso*, c. 12v.

between language—both diction and rhythm—to the subject matter. For Tritonio, Bolognetti easily moves between lower styles and higher styles according to the theme at hand:

Come poi l'Autore accomodi bene le parole, & il numero alle cose, & come  
hora si abbassi, hora con lo stile s'innalzi, & hora vada caminando tra la  
bassezza, & l'altezza lo può vedere ogni uno, c'habbia gusto di questi studi.<sup>83</sup>

In Tritonio's view, Bolognetti's ability has become obvious to the point of not requiring further elucidation on the minute rhetorical mechanisms at play.

Instead, Tritonio is more interested in exploring the ways in which Bolognetti accommodates language to "things" in terms of sound. For example, with the line "Di fortuna ogni hor fu saldo, & Costante," Tritonio comments that the rhythm produced in this line creates a clearer sense of "steadfastness" due to the frequent need to pause while pronouncing the line:

In proferir bene questo verso ultimo si vede la fermezza, perche bisogna  
posarsi quattro volte; cosi:  
*Di fortuna - ogni hor fù - saldo, - & Costante.*<sup>84</sup>

Such attention to the mimetic relationship between sound and content has been largely absent in most of the previous authors, save for Pigna. Yet even Pigna seemed to justify the use of harsh or dissonant language as long as it resolved in a harmonious way.

Tritonio, however, frequently praises the use of "instable" or "harsh" verses in order to amplify moments in the narrative.

Notate l'instabilità di Philidia in quel verso, che anch'egli a pena può stare in  
piedi:

*Di sua instabilità certo argomento.*

[...]

Accomodatissima è l'asprezza di quel verso:

*Giunta dov'era altero anchor Costante.*

Perche esprime & il luogo del conflitto, cosa per se stessa asprissima, & l'animo  
indurato del Guerriero in vendicarsi de' nemici.<sup>85</sup>

For Tritonio, the harsh language matches the harsh subject matter, which in itself is productive a positive aesthetic experience.

Even when words are mixed in a confusing manner, Tritonio believes that Bolognetti composed purposefully in this manner in order to reinforce the confused state of mind of a character:

<sup>83</sup> *Discorso*, c. 18r. This reference to a certain "taste" for this manner of study is rather interesting. Is Tritonio criticizing those who rely on overly rhetorical analyses of poetry? A more sustained analysis of Tritonio's views is doubtless necessary.

<sup>84</sup> *Discorso*, c. 19r.

<sup>85</sup> *Discorso*, c. 19r.

Non meno artificiosamente metta alquanto confuse le parole volendo esprimere  
 quel mostrarsi all'improvviso di Venere, & lo smarrirsi di Costante:

*Per questo all'improvviso alhor mostrarsi*

*La dea, smarrito si restò il Guerriero.*<sup>86</sup>

The key term in this passage is “artificiosamente,” which appears in various forms throughout the dialogue. It is clear that, for Tritonio, the most important aspect of Bolognetti's epic language is its “artful” or “artificial” nature.

Such praise stands in stark contrast to the poetic ideals articulated by earlier writers such as Giraldi. Their goal was the creation of a kind of poetry which makes its own artifice, producing instead a sense of “clarity” and “facility.” For Tritonio, artfulness involved adapting the language to the circumstances, which often produces presumably undesirable qualities such as harshness, confusion, instability, and so forth.

### 6.2.3 *The Audience for Epic*

Although we are primarily interested in exploring Tritonio's defense of the language of the *Costante*, it is worth looking first at his continuing emphasis on the intended audience of epic poetry. First, Tritonio claims that—despite the fact that the plot of Bolognetti's work is “abstruse” (“astruso”)—the poem will gradually become more popular as people begin to wean themselves of romances. He relies on a familiar reference, that of the ear, to describe modern taste, which will change following the preferences of “judicious men”:

ogni dì piacerà di più; ne saranno le orecchie tanto avvezze alle fole de' Romanzi, che non ascoltino molto più volentieri questa historia per se stessa grave, & ornata di bella varietà di casi rari.<sup>87</sup>

Tritonio here relies on the similar division seen earlier between an intelligentsia and the masses who are accustomed to the entertainment of romance.

This demarcation continues throughout his refutation of the criticisms levied against the *Costante*. Tritonio explains that epic poets, specifically Virgil, did not write in order to please “gardeners” and “blacksmiths,” but emperors, their patrons, and other people of culture.<sup>88</sup> As a result, not only romances, but other popular forms should be left to

<sup>86</sup> *Discorso*, c. 19r.

<sup>87</sup> *Discorso*, c. 22v. The phrase “fole de' romanzi” can be traced back to Petrarch. It also occurs in other treatises of this period. A useful study would be to trace the developing antagonism towards romance and the strategies and authorities used in that project. Thus far, we have only been able to indicate various traces of this growing animosity.

<sup>88</sup> “...per piacere a gli hortolani, e a i fabri; ovvero ad Augusto, a Mecenate, a Varro, et a gli altri valent' huomini.” See *Discorso*, c. 22r.



the masses, while epic poetry should be enjoyed by the elite: “Lasciansi le frottole, & gli strambotti al volgo; e i Poemi belli, et gravi com’è il Costante siano goduti da coloro, dai quali possono essere intesi.”<sup>89</sup> Tritonio concludes by suggesting that, if Ariosto had been alive and heard his poetry ruined by the singing of some dirty cobbler, he would not be pleased: “Se il vostro Ariosto vivesse non si rallegraria forse tanto in udire i suoi versi strapazzati da ogni vile calzolaio, quanto si doleria vedendogli poco stimati, per non dire sprezzati da gli huomini gravi.”<sup>90</sup> As a result, Tritonio—much like Bolognetti—not only relies on a strict division of audiences, but he also specifies the specific social classes that are denied access to “high” literature of epic: blacksmiths, cobblers, gardeners, and so forth.

Whether or not these references align with an actual social reality of particular consumers of poetry, it is worth noting the growing reliance on social class to help further distinguish between types of literature. While previously, writers on epic had assumed a certain degree of homogeneity among readers of poetry, now it has become an issue of establishing norms to construct a much more vertical cultural structure.<sup>91</sup>

Within his categories of different audiences based on social class, Tritonio also incorporates earlier aspects of the debate over epic poetry, such as the problem of “sweetness.” However, instead of producing an insurmountable obstacle to creating true epic, sweetness has become simply one of the necessary tools available to the specifically vernacular epic poet. For instance, in response to the criticism that Bolognetti’s often describes things in an overly “diffuse” manner, Tritonio introduces the rather novel idea that a vernacular epic poet, though necessarily imitating Virgil, must take into account the specific requirements of his own language.<sup>92</sup> For Tritonio, this means that an epic poet must keep in mind that “sweetness”—deriving from rhythm and rhyme—is an essential feature of vernacu-

89 *Discorso*, c. 22r. It is worth pointing out that Tritonio, like Giraldi in his critique of the *Canace*, relies on the lyrical form of the *frottola* as a marker for lower social class. Throughout this study it has become apparent that there is a growing vocabulary used by the emergent intellectual class in order to establish more clearly social hierarchies.

90 *Discorso*, c. 22r.

91 Such elitism will play a role in later defenses of Tasso’s epic. For example, Orazio Lombardelli and others will emphasize the fact that aspects of the epic are unintelligible to the masses is necessary. For Lombardelli, the baker should not carry about Tasso’s poem with him as a form of entertainment while wandering through the piazza. Instead, epic is reserved for the “più segrete stanze delle intendenti.” Part of my interest in this issue is complicating the rather old—and not particularly discriminating—point that there is a division between poetry as entertainment and poetry as moral edification. What we see in the case of epic poetry are the various attempts to establish a specific socio-cultural hegemony, whereby only an elite group of intellectuals has the means of determining the value and function of works of literature.

92 The criticism regarding descriptions reads: “si compiace troppo in descrivere molte cose diffusamente, come il concilio de gli Dei, gli amori de i mostri marini, etc... & altre cose depinte, & colorate con maggiore apparato, che non conviene alla qualità della Poesia Heroica.” *Discorso*, c. 21r.

lar poetry and must adjust his Virgilian imitations accordingly. Additionally, a vernacular poet must employ more "ornamentation" than a Latin writer:

perché avvegna che Vergilio sia più raccolto, et moderato in questa parte, non dimeno bisogna considerare, che si come all'uno non era lecito il diffondersi senza far torto alla gravità della materia, & della lingua; così l'altro è persuaso, & quasi sforzata a temprar la gravità con la piacevolezza, ricercando si fatta maniera la Poesia, & la lingua Italiana; nella qual viene non solamente comportata, ma commendata la delicatezza del numero, & delle rime, per la dolcezza grande, ch'è nel parlar nostro; quanto più si dè lodare quel Poeta, che sostiene, & che orna un'argomento con inventioni, & con parole piacevoli: è già entrato quest' uso nella nostra nazione accomodatissimo alla schiettezza, & alla bellezza d'Italia, di approvar quelle poesie, che più dilettono; ne maggior diletto possono ricevere le orecchie, & gli intelletti nostri, che sentendo una cosa descritta bene, & vagamente.<sup>93</sup>

Many previous terms are now being used in a new conceptual configuration. Sweetness, once the enemy of epic poets such as Trissino and Bernardo, has now become not only an essential element of traditional vernacular poetry, but one that delights the intellect. In other words, this particular aesthetic feature of the vernacular no longer determines the "pleasantness" of popular poetry, against which a new, "serious" language must compete. Instead, Tritonio recognizes that such fundamental elements of vernacular poetry must be incorporated into epic, in particular as the narrative situation requires them. Thus, the issue of understanding Virgil's approach to epic language involves accommodating his images and descriptions to the specific nature and customs of the vernacular.

Tritonio further defends Bolognetti's use of "piacevolezza" and "diletto" in his descriptions by distinguishing between the necessary stylistic variety of epic and the limited range of romance. Since the *Costante* offers an elevated subject matter, pleasant digressions and descriptions do not effect the overall tone of the poem. Indeed, Tritonio finds that such shifts in style are useful for "tempering" the severity of the work. Romance, on the other hand, should avoid such subtle stylistic shifts, due primarily to their generally "low" thematic concerns:

queste descrittioni vaghe, & ample, convenivano forse meno a lui [i.e. Ariosto], & gli altri scrittori Romanzi, che al Bolognetti, poi che essendo quasi tutto l'argomento loro più tosto basso, che alto; come quello; che per la maggior parte contiene amori, & prodezze sgarbate di quei Paladini, non haveva bisogno di esser temperato con tali delicatezze, che in un certo modo gli snervano.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>93</sup> *Discorso*, c. 24v.

<sup>94</sup> *Discorso*, cc. 24v-25r.

It is not Ariostan romance, but Virgilian epic, that continues to provide the ultimate horizon of expressive possibility in the vernacular.

This same line of reasoning concerning shifts in linguistic use suffuses Tritonio's response to the criticism that Bolognetti's style is "low" and "languid," rather than elevated or sonorous ("dicovi che a me pare, che più tosto habbia del basso, & del languido, che dell'alto, & del sonoro").<sup>95</sup> Tritonio, perhaps not taking the critique seriously, begins by simply affirming that Bolognetti's style is, in fact, "grave, & sonoro,"<sup>96</sup> offering as a further defense the fact that the *Costante* contains a wide range of styles:

Et anchor che i gusti delli stili siani varij, parendo ad alcuni l'alto humile; ad altri l'humile sonoro; & ad altri il sonoro, & l'humile mediocre; non dimeno vi voglio mostrare, che tutti gli stili sono tanto accomodatamente usati in questo Poema, & principalmente il grave, proprio alla materia Heroica, che voi stesso confessarete o di non haverlo assaggiato bene, o d'havere havuto fin'hora depravato il gusto.<sup>97</sup>

This comment echoes his earlier point that Bolognetti has succeeded in tempering an overly serious subject matter with a variety of styles, making use of the natural pleasantness of the vernacular. Nevertheless, given the fact that it is a heroic poem, the "stile grave" occupies the majority of the stylistic space in the work. Moreover, Tritonio introduces the notion of taste, specifically the notion that at stake is the problem of competing sensibilities and kinds of poetic appreciation. This comment calls to mind once more the other descriptions of ideal poetic language seen in other authors, such as Giralaldi. Yet, while Tritonio initially seems to allow some degree of subjectivity in response to the poem, he also implies that those who have criticized its style have mainly lacked proper taste.

Within the fictional dialogue with the anonymous critic in the second section of the *Discorso*, Tritonio decides to prove the superiority of Bolognetti's style by reading aloud stanzas from both the *Orlando furioso* and the *Costante*. From the *Furioso*, he chooses, seemingly at random, Canto 30, Stanza 38, a well-known and often praised stanza ("lodato da ciascuno"):

Deh, vita mia, non vi mettete affanno,  
Deh non, per Dio, di così lieve cosa;

<sup>95</sup> The criticism continues, offering examples of affected language, "se ben' egli si sforza di sostentarlo con certi suoi averbij peculiari, come horribilmente replicato infinite volte ... & in mille altri modi; così con queste voci: hor; talhor, anchor; ogni hor; più tosto per empitura di versi, che per bisogno. Vi conchiudo in pochissime parole, che non è mestier d'ogni uno lo scriver bene in ottava rima, & ch'è vanità l'affaticarsi di superare, o di agguagliar l'Ariosto." See *Discorso*, cc. 21v-22r. The anonymous critic continues to function not only as a justification to defend Bolognetti, but more specifically as an apologist for Ariostan romance.

<sup>96</sup> *Discorso*, c. 26r.

<sup>97</sup> *Discorso*, c. 26r.

Che se Carlo e 'l re d'Africa, e ciò c'hanno  
 Qui di gente moresca e di franciosa,  
 Spiegasson le bandiere in mio sol danno,  
 Voi pur non ne dovreste esser pensosa.  
 Ben mi mostrate in poco conto avere,  
 Se per me un Ruggier sol vi fa temere.

According to Tritonio, the popularity of this stanza emerges not due to any art found in the lines themselves, but due to the ease with which lower classes were able to sing the verses: "ogni giorno è tanto cantata fino per le botege de' sarti, & de' legnaiuoli."<sup>98</sup> The social group who reads and enjoys Ariosto now includes not only blacksmiths and gardeners, but also tailors and carpenters.

By re-introducing the issue of social class, Tritonio suggests that, once again, the erudite public has been mistaken in its initial appraisal of Ariosto's poetic craft. The anonymous critic comes to agree that Ariosto's language in this stanza is low and the meter inelegant:

Et fu conchiuso, poi che da tutti fu con molta diligentia esaminata, ch'era bassissima, & che quella voce *Franzosa*, posta per cadentia nel quarto verso, era bastante a stroppiare quel si voglia stanza, per bellissima che fosse in tutto il rimanente.<sup>99</sup>

For contrast, Tritonio then chooses a random stanza from the tenth canto of the *Costante* which best exemplifies Bolognetti's stylistic practice. In this stanza, the goddess Juno, enraged at her failure to halt Costante, summons a Fury to provoke the warrior Regillano:

Con quel furor, che ogni hor non pur l'invita,  
 Ma sforza a dar per ben travagli, & mali,  
 Più volte & padre, & madre havria di vita  
 Tratti, se stati fossero mortali;  
 Talche de l'empia sua rabbia infinita  
 Forte temendo il Re de l'infenali  
 Ombre, al futuro mal prese consiglio  
 Scacciando quella in sempiterno essiglio.<sup>100</sup>

For Tritonio, these lines are particularly effective because of the use of rough and difficult words, which evoke the horror of the Fury before the eyes of the reader. Though the verse becomes "hard" ("duro") and "strepitous" ("strepitoso"), such qualities are a stylistic virtue in the service of greater imaginative efficacy.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>98</sup> *Discorso*, c. 26r.

<sup>99</sup> *Discorso*, c. 26v. Most modern editions read "franciosa."

<sup>100</sup> These lines are taken from *Il Costante di M. Francesco Bolognetti*. In Bologna: Per Giovanni Rossi, 1566, pg. 505.

<sup>101</sup> "volendo far veder con gli occhi il furor di questa Furia, & l'horror, ch'ella apporta, studiosamente [Bolognetti] usa parole ruvide, & scabrose, facendo un verso duro, & strepitoso in questa maniera." *Discorso*, c. 27r.

He further claims that the first line in particular offers the clearest example of such techniques for producing harshness and sonority. The first six words all end in a consonant, three of which are the letter "R." For Tritonio, the texture created with this line conforms well to the image of the Fury being expelled from hell.<sup>102</sup>

All of Tritonio's arguments convince the anonymous critic that Bolognetti's poem is, after all, rather well-written.<sup>103</sup> It is agreed that the virtue of these various lines lie in Bolognetti's "artificio," that is, his ability to use language that seems necessary to the subject matter and not language selected for its ease of understanding and felicity of sound.<sup>104</sup> Moreover, after attempting to rearrange various words and lines, Tritonio and the critic conclude that Bolognetti had made use of the best possible arrangement of the verse ("onde si conchiuse, che non potevano star meglio").<sup>105</sup>

The two interlocutors further conclude that Bolognetti's general use of words, though previously criticized, is in reality extraordinarily impressive. The emphasis continues to fall on the fact that words or phrases continue to be serious ("grave") and sonorous ("sonora").<sup>106</sup> Lastly, the rhymes are also "alte, scelte, & sonore."<sup>107</sup>

The entire debate about the "lowness" of Bolognetti's style involves demonstrating that the *Costante* is a poem with a particular *sound*. Although Tritonio everywhere praises the mutability of this sound, and Bolognetti's ability to adapt to a given subject matter, it is frequently the specific sounds of *gravitas*, sonority, and harshness that he emphasizes. Such sounds are clearly placed in contrast to the *Orlando furioso*, which—as we have seen—turns out to be a "lowly" poem, both in terms of artistry and the social level of its typical audience. Ultimately convinced, the anonymous critic physically tears up his written critique of the poem, deciding to reread the poem with fresh eyes. Tritonio closes by informing us that this critic has since become one of Bolognetti's most vocal public

<sup>102</sup> In reality, Tritonio also responds to a specific criticism levied against Bolognetti, namely that his poem frequently uses words like "ogni hor," which should be avoided. Tritonio responds, "Eccovi che in questo verso sono sei parole l'una dietro a l'altra, che tutte finiscono da consonante, & tre esse finiscono in questa lettera R. perche volendo mostrare quel furor, per cagion del quale ella fu discacciata dell'Inferno, era necessario a far cosi, & chi volesse quella voce *ogni hor* di questo verso, oltre che non si può tanto bene è collocata, ma quando si potesse, se gli levarebbe tutto l'artificio." *Discorso*, c. 27r.

<sup>103</sup> "Et finalmente havendo noi lette buon numero di stanze tutte ritrovate a caso una in qua, & l'altra in là, ci parve di gir sempre migliorando; talche l'amico cominciò a poco a poco a disdirsi, confessando d'haver preso errore, & di non haver prima veduta alcuna di quelle parti." *Discorso*, c. 27r.

<sup>104</sup> The critic finds that, with all of the stanzas read aloud, "tutte stavano benissimo, & ch'erano collocate, & poste non a caso, ma con artificio grande."

<sup>105</sup> *Discorso*, c. 27r.

<sup>106</sup> Regarding "orribilmente," another word initially condemned by the critic: "fu conchiuso quella esser bella, grave, & sonora; se il Petrarca l'ha usata nel suo Poema Lirico, tanto più l'ha potuto fare il Bolognetti nel suo Poema Heroico." *Discorso*, c. 27v.

<sup>107</sup> *Discorso*, c. 27v.

supporters.<sup>108</sup> Nevertheless, we know now that, despite Tritonio's best efforts to elevate and justify intellectually the *Costante*, the poem would find few public supporters. As previously mentioned, the complete, twenty-book edition of the poem was never published, perhaps due to Bolognetti's own dissatisfaction with the initial reception.

Bolognetti's *Costante*, as a site of debate for writers and intellectuals, offers an example of the changing emphasis in discussions on classical epic in the vernacular. Initially, in the first decades of the century, vernacular epic was largely a question of meter, of finding the appropriate corresponding form to hexameter as seen in Virgil and Homer. Writers were especially concerned with finding a narrative metrical scheme in opposition to traditional lyrical structures, one which would allow for syntactic flexibility, poetic freedom, and the production of the sense of *gravitas*. In fact, many of the competing views focused on ways of achieving the elevated aesthetic registers found in classical literature, including not only epic but also tragedy. As a result, much of the debate, from the discussion over heroic meter to the brief debate over Speroni's tragedy the *Canace* involves identifying the best strategies for producing a suitably "grave" vernacular form.

Within this continuing debate over the suitability of the vernacular to classical literary types, *ottava rima* emerges as the preferable form for heroic poetry, though not without resistance from poets like Bernardo Tasso, who faces the dilemma of following his theoretical convictions or capitulating to the demands of his patron. Nevertheless, chivalric romance—and thus the *ottava*—becomes the widespread model for heroic poetry, not only because of its popularity, but also because of the efforts to intellectualize Ariosto through the works by Fornari, Giraldi, and Pigna. All of these defenses contribute in different ways to the legitimization of *ottava rima* as the supreme heroic form.

The focus on Ariosto also shifts the discussion from questions of meter to narrative structure, following the recent recovery and diffusion of Aristotle's *Poetics*. Out of this new conversation on narrative two separate forms of heroic poetry emerge: vernacular romance, which contains multiple plot lines, and classical epic, which is based on narrative unity. At this point in the sixteenth century, classical epic has found no satisfying correspondent model in the vernacular. Indeed, recent attempts at producing a classicizing epic, namely the works of Trissino and Alamanni, end in abject failure, despite their vast erudition and unity of plot.

<sup>108</sup> "Stracciata la cartuzza, ch'egli haveva in mano, pregommi a volerlo un'altra volta accommodar del Costante, tanto che lo potesse leggere tutto continuatamente." The critic then ends up spending two months rereading the poem, ultimately praising it "fino al Cielo [...] tal che di severissimo Censore del Bolognetti è divenuto publico banditore delle sue lodi." *Discorso*, c. 27v.

Despite this shift away from the metrical question in the 1540s and 1550s, several writers do continue to focus on the issue, such as Francesco Patrizi, Matteo San Martino, and Girolamo Muzio. Muzio in particular will continue to exert a limited, though notable, influence on thinking about classical epic isolated ways, such as with Bolognetti's later poems. While Bolognetti himself is uncertain of using *ottava rima*, he does choose it for his *Costante*; however, he also displays a clear animosity towards the form of chivalric romance. Much of this frustration moves beyond mere issues of narrative structure to his own creation of a severe, intellectual, explicitly anti-plebeian form of literature. Ultimately, his main challenge is to summon from the vernacular an appropriately epic language, one which appears to be inherently exclusionary.

Tritonio's defense of Bolognetti shares a similar interest in language. Apart from defending the *Costante* from criticisms concerning obscure subject matter or the use of certain characters, Tritonio's emphasis lies on the importance of Bolognetti's style, which is much more classical than previous vernacular romance authors. In his view, Virgil—rather than Ariosto—must become the primary model of imitation. Instead of worrying about meter, however, Tritonio focuses on the matter of imitating Virgilian imagery, descriptions, and language. Throughout his defense, Tritonio points to the fact that vernacular poetry requires different stylistic solutions than those found in Latin. For instance, in lengthy epic descriptions, a more artificial language is required in order to properly express the a specific moment in the narrative. This position relies on the familiar requirement of suitable correspondence between form and content; however, the matter of rhyme or metrical scheme has disappeared. In other words, despite a conventional rhetorical origin for his approach, Tritonio's position indicates a complete shift away from issues of meter to issues of style.

For Tritonio, Bolognetti rightly employs a highly artificial language that is capable of shifting between styles according to the subject matter. For example, the *Costante* includes not only pretty and "diffuse" descriptions, but also "harsh" and "unstable" moments. Tritonio praises Bolognetti's use of dissonant and artificial forms, which is a position in direct contrast with the earlier views of poetry, such as those of Tolomei and Giraldi, that emphasize clarity and facility.

This movement away from both metrical concerns as well as stylistic *facilitas* towards a more challenging form continues in the theory and practice of Torquato Tasso, who makes harshness central to his own understanding of epic language. As we shall see, although Tasso conforms largely to the matter of Aristotelian narrative conventions, he offers a

complete reorientation of the terms of the debate. Not only does he introduce the new concept of "variation in unity" for epic plot, but he also focuses much of his efforts on articulating a theory of epic style based in harshness and unusual structures. Underlying this stylistic theory is a broader, coherent vision of epic poetry as a form of literature that elicits a specific aesthetic experience, that of wonder.



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## 7.1 TORQUATO TASSO'S NEW APPROACH TO EPIC

We now return to the poet whose epic *Gerusalemme liberata* opened the investigation, Torquato Tasso. While this *cursus* has seemed somewhat teleological in nature, it will become clear that Tasso is not a culmination of the issues under discussion. Rather, he presents the rare combination of both a theorist and a poet whose epic was widely praised. Moreover, as we have seen, the success of his work generated further debate about changing tastes and concerns. Tasso is therefore not some rare and unique individual but a highly concentrated example around whom the issues we have discussed now constellate. Understanding his position as the development of several lines of thinking will help us not only clarify his brilliant interpretation of the theoretical issues, but also allow us a fresher understanding of his poem within sixteenth century Italian letters.

We will begin by looking at his milieu in order to situate him within a cultural context populated by many of the previous authors seen in our study. From there, we will address his theory of epic language as articulated in several documents produced during the composition of the *Liberata*. These documents include his first treatise on poetics known as the *Discorsi dell'arte poetica*, his lecture on the poet Giovanni Della Casa, and his letters to the revisers of his epic during the final stage of composition.

7.1.1 *The Literary-intellectual Milieu*

Born in Sorrento in 1544, Tasso spent the majority of his early life moving around central and northern Italy with his father Bernardo.<sup>1</sup> Following Bernardo's break with his patron Ferrante Sanseverino in 1552, they left the Bay of Naples to head north. Important stops were in Pesaro, Urbino, and Venice, where Bernardo entrusted the education of his son to important intellectuals and writers, some of whom we have already encountered, such as Girolamo Muzio. Later, Tasso attended the universities of both Padua and Bologna, where

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<sup>1</sup> For a recent and comprehensive biography of Tasso see Claudio Gigante. *Tasso*. Rome: Salerno editrice, 2007.

he interacted with many of the thinkers who were coming to terms with the growing debates over poetry and rhetoric. Tasso spent considerable time in the early 1560s at the literary salons and impromptu “academies” hosted by Sperone Speroni in Padua and Francesco Bolognetti in Bologna.

Within these networks of thinkers and writers, Tasso met virtually all of the previous authors that we have encountered, and several of them served as teachers and mentors during his formative years. Let us then summarize briefly the milieu through which Tasso moved in his early life, not to establish some kind of chain of influence on the poet, but rather to make sense of Tasso’s own participation in the debate that emerged in the mid sixteenth century.

Tasso’s early education began in Pesaro and Urbino in 1557, when Bernardo put him under the protection of Guidobaldo II Delle Rovere, Duke of Urbino. There, he studied topics such as mathematics and Greek with well-known philosophers, while also interacting with the many important figures passing through the Duke’s court. Of these various intellectuals, artists, and poets, Tasso met Girolamo Muzio, who may himself have suggested the subject of an epic poem on the first crusade to the young Torquato.<sup>2</sup>

In 1559, Tasso left Pesaro with his father and travelled to Venice. By this point, he had already begun working on the first cantos of his epic, in a version now generally called *Il Gierusalemme*. In Venice, Bernardo helped found a new academy in 1560, which included important Venetian figures, including editors and printers, such as Paolo Manuzio, Girolamo Ruscelli, and poets, such as Domenico Venier. While in Venice, the young Tasso also befriended the writer Giovan Maria Verdizotti and sculptor Danese Cataneo, who would become influential in Tasso’s decision to continue undertaking his epic enterprise. These Venetian friends, particularly Cataneo, were instrumental in pushing Tasso to publish his first major work, the chivalric romance *Rinaldo*, later printed in 1562.<sup>3</sup>

In October of 1560, Tasso moved to Padua, where he enrolled in jurisprudence at the Studio. In Padua, he also attended literary salons at the house of Sperone Speroni. He also came into contact with some of the most important philosophers of the period, including Federico Pendasio, Francesco Piccolomini, and Carlo Sigonio. Due to a heated academic dispute, Sigonio would eventually leave Padua for Bologna in 1562, and Tasso, in November of that same year, followed him.

<sup>2</sup> See Muzio’s letter to Bolognetti, in Albert N. Mancini (1989). *I capitoli letterari di Francesco Bolognetti: Tempi e modi della letteratura epica fra l’Ariosto e il Tasso*. Naples: Federico & Ardia, pg. 177.

<sup>3</sup> At that same time, Cataneo himself was composing a chivalric romance, *Amor di Marfisa*, also printed in 1562.

Although he only stayed in Bologna for a year, Tasso not only frequented the Bolognese Studio, but also attended salons at the home of Francesco Bolognetti. There he engaged in debates concerning the development of lyric poetry. These discussions made a lasting impression on Tasso's formulation of different poetic styles. In fact, one of these discussions will reappear as the setting of Tasso's much later dialogue *La Cavaletta*, written in the early 1580s.

After a year in Bologna, Tasso returned to Padua, where he continued to participate in the literary life. Not only did he return to Speroni's circle, but he also joined a new academy of young poets, the Accademia degli Etereï, many of whom were at the Paduan Studio. He left Padua in 1565, despite never acquiring a full degree in philosophy. Instead, he passed directly into the services of cardinal Luigi d'Este, requiring him to move to Ferrara.

Tasso's movements and activity in Ferrara between 1566 and 1571 are difficult to trace, although we have several letters that give some idea. In 1566, the first edition of an anthology of poetry from the Accademia degli Etereï was printed in Padova. In that same year, Tasso had reached the sixth canto of his epic poem. In September 1569, Bernardo died, leaving Tasso to manage his remaining debts. Around this time, he offered several lectures on epic poetry, as well as a lecture on Giovanni Della Casa. In 1570, Luigi D'Este traveled to France, taking much of his retinue with him, including Tasso. After five unhappy months in France, Tasso decided to return to Italy ahead of Luigi, seeking employment with Alfonso II, the cardinal's brother and duke of Ferrara. By this point, Tasso had completed roughly eight cantos of his epic.

The early 1570s are marked by a period of relative prosperity for Tasso, as he not only managed to finish an early draft of the entire epic by 1574, but he also composed and had performed his pastoral drama the *Aminta*. He travelled to Rome in 1575, where he met with several men who would become his revisers for his epic. On his return trip from Rome, he stopped at Siena where he read the twelfth canto of the *Liberata*. In early January, he also went to Florence, where he discussed poetry with Vincenzo Borghini and Orazio Capponi. Starting in 1575, he continued to edit his epic, hoping to publish it at various points throughout the revision process. His correspondence with his Roman "revisers" lasted until the summer of 1576, when we could hypothesize that he had finished, more or less, working on the poem.

The *Liberata* would not be published until 1581 in various pirated editions. Tasso himself had, by then, been imprisoned in the Hospital of Sant'Anna for madness, where he would

remain until 1586. Although he will continue to think about poetry, from *La Cavaletta* to a later treatise on poetry, *Discorsi del poema hoerici*, we will focus our considerations of Tasso's thought and works on the early part of his life, leading up to the revision of his poem in the mid 1570s.

Within Tasso's itinerary as a young poet, we can trace his various positions on epic poetry from the previous decades. Tasso comes to know Muzio, the greatest proponent of Trissino's vision of epic poetry and language. He also meets many writers in Venice who are also debating the future of epic, from Domenico Venier to the editors of Bernardo's *Amadigi* (1560). In Padua, he spends a significant amount of time with Speroni, who will, in fact, later accuse Tasso of plagiarizing his ideas. In Bologna, his participation in the debates on poetic language will remain with Tasso, who will remember the discussions well into the 1580s.

All of which is to say that Tasso was immersed in various perspectives on the status and possibility of vernacular epic poetry. We also know that, even at an early age, he was convinced of his ability to write such a poem. Thus, he was especially interested in developing a position on the actual practice of epic composition. The point of describing his interaction with all of these various thinkers is not to determine their influence on his ultimate decision. Instead, it is important to highlight that Tasso found himself, in his formative years, amid the widest range of possible positions to take on the question of vernacular epic. It is also clear that Tasso saw himself as part of the ongoing attempts to resolve the problem of the lack of vernacular epic.<sup>4</sup> Let us now turn to his theory of vernacular epic.

### 7.1.2 *A New Approach to Poetry*

Although our focus will be on Tasso's theory of epic style, it will be necessary first to understand his approach to poetry more generally. And despite the many facets of Tasso's conception of epic, much of which has been addressed in scholarship, we will focus on several key ideas that also inform his unique approach to language. In particular, we will look at the unique method that Tasso employs for understanding poetry, which involves navigating the tension between inalterable artistic principles derived from classical thought and the reality of historical contingency and contemporary customs. An impor-

<sup>4</sup> For an analysis of Tasso's self-conception, particularly in the early 1560s, see Appendix II, where I analyze the metaphors of poetic form that Tasso uses to describe his activity as a young poet following in the footsteps of Virgil.

tant outcome of this method involves dismantling the concept of multiplicity which has preoccupied many of Tasso's contemporaries. For Tasso, there is a clear and important distinction to be made between multiplicity and variety, which is a fundamental feature of human aesthetic experience. It is due to this method that Tasso is able to characterize the works of Trissino and Ariosto, the two negative models of heroic poetry, as emblematic of uncritical tendencies to emphasize either classical ideals or contemporary customs. Tasso's approach is thus to shuttle between these the poles of universal principle and contemporary practice in order to develop not only a more properly epic narrative, but also a sufficiently epic language, all without sacrificing the necessary requirement that the poem be enjoyable.

Tasso's *Discorsi dell'arte poetica*, originally an academic lecture offered sometime in 1562-64, offers valuable insight into his approach to epic poetry. The opening statement of the work outlines a much more systematic method than the ones seen in previous authors:

A tre cose deve aver riguardo ciascuno che di scriver poema eroico si prepone: a sceglier materia tale che sia atta a ricever in sè quella più eccellente forma che l'artificio del poeta cercherà d'introdurvi; a darle questa tal forma; e a vestirla ultimamente con que' più esquisiti ornamenti ch'alla natura di lei siano convenevoli.<sup>5</sup>

In terms of methodology, Tasso presents a clear synthesis of Aristotelian hylomorphism (the absolute priority of form and matter in any investigation) with a traditional rhetoric schema—*inventio*, *dispositio*, and *elocutio*. Each rhetorical concept constitutes a different section of the work, where Tasso discusses different Aristotelian issues. As a result, in contrast to previous attempts to incorporate Aristotle into poetic theory, Tasso offers a clearly defined approach for organizing the content of *Poetics*, which does not follow the typical order of things.

Under *inventio*, Tasso addresses the issue of subject matter, with its attendant Aristotelian concerns about history, truth, and verisimilitude. For *dispositio*, he moves on to narrative organization, focusing on issues of multiplicity, unity, and the importance of narrative logic on audience expectations. Lastly, he addresses linguistic form, *elocutio*, which lacks a corresponding discussion in Aristotle's treatise, apart from several comments which we have seen taken up occasionally by previous authors (namely the issue of a stable and "turgid" language). As we shall see in the next section, Tasso approaches the issue of language in an entirely new manner, by relying exclusively on certain Post-Aristotelian Hellenistic rhetoricians, namely Demetrius. Indeed, Demetrius'

<sup>5</sup> Tasso, Torquato, and Luigi Poma. *Discorsi dell'arte poetica e del poema eroico*. Bari: G. Laterza, 1964, pg. 3.

rhetorical treatise *On Style*, which had been translated into Latin only relatively recently, will provide the foundation for Tasso's whole approach to epic language.<sup>6</sup>

Fundamental to Tasso's theory of epic language is aesthetic experience. More specifically, he emphasizes the development of an epic style that produces wonder in the mind of the reader. Such a style emerges from well-defined stylistic strategies, such as complex syntax and harsh sounding language.

Before analyzing Tasso's theory of style in detail, let us first look at his larger theory of epic in order to establish a more coherent framework for understanding the role of aesthetic experience. Central to his unique conception of epic is his philosophical—and more specifically Aristotelian—foundation. This theoretical basis provides Tasso with a set of principles for clearly articulating differences in poetic form. For instance, Tasso views poetry, following the *Poetics*, as essentially a form of imitation which can be divided into different species according to the kind of thing imitated, the manner of imitation, and the instruments employed:

Pone Aristotele nella sua Poetica tre differenze essenziali e specifiche (per così chiamarle), per le quai differenze l'un poema dall'altro si separa e si distingue. Queste sono: le diversità delle cose imitate, del modo d'imitare, de gli istrumenti co' quali s'imita. Le cose sono l'azioni. Il modo è il narrare e il rappresentare [...] Gli istrumenti sono il parlare, l'armonia e 'l ritmo. <sup>7</sup>

This view of poetry as imitation appears frequently throughout earlier authors, including Giraldi and Pigna; however, their approach to Aristotle's taxonomy is much less strict than Tasso's.

In fact, as a result of a more rigid Aristotelian framework, unlike most—if not all—of the previous authors, Tasso considers epic and romance to be of the same kind of heroic poetry. In his discussion of plot, he states that both epic and romance address the same topic (the thing imitated), in the same manner, with the same instruments: "Dalla convenienza, dunque, delle azioni imitate e degli istrumenti e del modo d'imitare si conclude essere la medesima spezie di poesia quella ch'epica vien detta e quella che romanzo si chiama."<sup>8</sup> However, it is important to emphasize that, although Tasso does situate both kinds of poetry under the same species, he continues to refer to them as distinct. In other words, although Tasso relies on Aristotelian principles to provide broad generic distinc-

6 For an overview of the history of this treatise in the Renaissance, see Bernard Weinbeg, "Translations and Commentaries on Demetrius, 'On Style' to 1600: A Bibliography," in *Philological Quarterly*, 30, 1951, pp. 353-380. For convenience, we will continue to refer to the author as Demetrius, rather than Pseudo-Demetrius, despite the fact that the author of the work has yet to be established.

7 *Arte poetica*, pg. 12.

8 *Arte poetica*, pg. 27.

tions (heroic, tragic, comedic) for organizing the world of poetry, he is also attuned to differences in poetic practice. In fact, despite his belief in a stable category of heroic poetry, Tasso also presents the most coherent view of historical change, which allows for differences in not only taste, but also religion and language.

Fundamental to this historical awareness is the simple fact that cultures change over time, thereby producing audiences with differing expectations in terms of the content and form of poetry. Ultimately, this perspective implies that many of the components of contemporary culture are historically contingent, that is, matters of custom could have been otherwise. The clearest example of such contingency appears in Tasso's discussion of religion. In the first book of the *Arte poetica* Tasso summarizes the necessary elements of a good epic:

Eccovi, signor Scipione, le condizioni che giudizioso poeta deve nella materia nuda ricercare, le quali (repilogando in breve giro di parole quanto s'è detto) sono queste: l'auttorità dell'istoria, la verità della religione, la licenza del fingere, la qualità de' tempi accomodati e la grandezza e nobiltà de gli avvenimenti.<sup>9</sup>

A proper modern epic poem must rely on the authority of history, being grounded in the "truth" of Christian doctrine. It appears that Tasso introduces the question of religion as an absolute truth, necessary to any modern poem; however, he then proceeds to discuss religion entirely in terms of credibility, a necessary component for the production of wonder in the minds of the public. In other words, Christian elements are necessary because they provide a coherent set of believable expectations about the narrative world which reflects current worldviews.

Tasso goes so far as to claim that belief in phenomena like angels, demons, and magic, are all instilled in the minds of men from birth as a matter of custom, rather than as a necessary religious truth. As a result, contemporary epic poets should rely on similarly Christian "miracles" in order to establish a degree of plausibility in the mind of the reader:

Queste opere, se per se stesse saranno considerate, maravigliose parranno, anzi miracoli sono chiamati nel commune uso di parlare. Queste medesime, se si avrà riguardo alla virtù e alla potenza di chi l'ha operate, verisimili saranno giudicate; perchè, avendo gli uomini nostri bevuta nelle fasce insieme co 'l latte questa opinione, ed essendo poi in loro confermata da i maestri della nostra santa fede (cioè che Dio e i suoi ministri e i demoni e i maghi, permettendolo Lui, possino far cose sovra le forze della natura meravigliose), e leggendo e sentendo ogni dì ricordarne novi essemi, non parrà loro fuori del verisimile

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<sup>9</sup> *Arte poetica*, pp. 13-14.



quello che credono non solo esser possibile, ma stimano spesse fiate esser avvenuto e poter di novo molte volte avvenire.<sup>10</sup>

As a result, for Tasso, Christian religion is less a doctrinal necessity for the modern poet and more a matter of verisimilitude.

Tasso emphasizes this point by discussing the audiences of Antiquity, who believed in the pagan gods, despite the apparently contrary evidence provided by ancient natural philosophers:

Si com'anco a quegli antichi, che viveano negli errori della lor vana religione, non deveano parer impossibili que' miracoli che de' lor dei favoleggiavano non solo i poeti, ma l'istorie talora; [...] se pur gli uomini scienziati impossibili (com'essi erano) li giudicavano.<sup>11</sup>

Tasso concludes that, for the poet, the truth of things is less important than the beliefs of the multitude: "basta al poeta in questo, com'in molte altre cose, la opinion della moltitudine, alla quale molte volte, lassando l'esatta verità delle cose, e suole e deve attenersi."<sup>12</sup> Thus, rather than take a doctrinal or orthodox Christian position on the falsehood and truth of one religion or another, Tasso's point relies entirely on the dominant culture's system of beliefs. For Tasso, the poet must appeal to the "multitude," a group of people that does not imply a given social class so much as a more neutral majority of people within a given culture. The goal of an epic poet is to achieve adherence to the principles set forward by Aristotle in terms of subject matter, narrative, and language, by always keeping in view the preferences and expectations of one's contemporary "multitude."

Such an approach differs considerably from the points made by Bolognetti, who sees the popular appeal of romance as devaluing and detracting from the high culture of epic. Though he doubtlessly incorporates many aspects of Ariostan romance into his own work—as is clear by Speroni's criticisms—, Bolognetti also declares himself as moving in a different, and more intellectually rigorous direction, than that taken by the poets appealing to blacksmiths, gardeners, and so forth. Tritonio, in his defense of the *Costante*, takes a similar approach. Bolognetti's poem must be vigorously separated from romance and the plebeian social classes. Tasso, on the other hand, seems less worried about these matters. Instead, romance—that is, modern taste—offers Tasso a necessary point for orienting his theory of a vernacular epic poem.

Tasso's conceptualization of epic poetry thus derives from two mutually constitutive aspects. On the one hand, he outlines a set of transhistorical principles, including not only

<sup>10</sup> *Arte poetica*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>11</sup> *Arte poetica*, pg. 8.

<sup>12</sup> *Arte poetica*, pg. 8.

the Aristotelian theory of imitation, but also matters of credibility and verisimilitude. On the other, he insists on the analysis of changing attitudes and expectations on a historical level concerning those fundamental components.

### 7.1.3 *Reframing the Debate*

Tasso's emphasis on historical change establishes a more grounded understanding of taste and artistic sensibility. As a result, he provides a sophisticated analysis of the relationship between narrative unity and the pleasure produced by such structures.

Tasso begins by mentioning the debates ("varie e lunghe contese a coloro") raging on about the topic of multiplicity ("la moltitudine delle azioni").<sup>13</sup> He separates the ongoing debate into two camps: those who deny the necessity of multiplicity and those who embrace it. Tasso explains their disparate justifications as a matter of relying either on the authority of Aristotle and classical poets or on contemporary custom:

facendosi i difensori della unità scudo della autorità d' Aristotele, della maestà de gli antichi greci e latini poeti, nè mancando loro quelle armi che dalla ragione sono somministrate; ma hanno per avversarii l'uso de' presenti secoli, il consenso universale delle donne e cavalieri e delle corti, e, sì come pare, l'esperienza ancora, infallibile paragone della verità.<sup>14</sup>

Tasso's approach to analyzing this debate relies on the same methodological movement seen previously. He contrasts the authority and reason ("ragione") of classical principles, namely those of Aristotle, with the truth of experience ("esperienza"), namely contemporary preference for certain types of poetry. Rather than criticize either of these two positions, Tasso establishes both of them as insufficient when considered in isolation. Despite his obvious command of classical concepts, Tasso, much like his father, also proves to be attentive to the influence of the "universal consensus" ("consenso universale") of the tastes of court.

In fact, as with Bernardo, Tasso finds that the true aim of poetry ("fine della poesia") should be "enjoyment" ("diletto").<sup>15</sup> Yet producing enjoyment derives from an awareness of the tastes and expectations of contemporary readers:

quelle poesie sono più eccellenti che meglio questo fine [i.e. del diletto] conseguiscono; ma meglio il consegue il romanzo che l'epopeia, come l'esperienza dimostra. [...] Concedo parimente quel che l'esperienza ci dimostra, cioè che

<sup>13</sup> *Arte poetica*, pg. 22.

<sup>14</sup> *Arte poetica*, pg. 22.

<sup>15</sup> *Arte poetica*, pg. 34.

maggior diletto rechi a' nostri uomini il *Furioso* che l'*Italia liberata* o pur l'*Iliada* o l'*Odissea*.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, according to Tasso, poets must accept that modern readers prefer to read Ariosto rather than Trissino, or even Homer. Unlike Bolognetti or Muzio, Tasso does not seem to condemn contemporary preferences for chivalric romance in the name of a truly classical form. Instead, he sees the problem as one of identifying more precisely the contours of this preference.

Tasso thus continually focuses on the problem of modern custom as the result of changes in taste over time. He turns his attention to the matter of language, an aspect of contemporary culture that has also undergone substantial modification throughout history. He points to the use of words themselves, which go into disuse, disappear, become ugly, or are reborn. For Tasso, such changes occur according to usage, which is virtually arbitrary in nature ("come piace all'uso, che con pieno e libero arbitrio le governa").<sup>17</sup> He extends this analysis of lexical changes to include all types of human custom, including manners of dressing as well as languages more generally:

[C]oncludono i peripatetici, contra quello che alcuni filosofi credettero, che le parole non siano opere dalla natura composte, nè più in lor natura una cosa ch'un'altra significhino (chè se tali fossero, dall'uso non dependerebbono), ma che siano fattura de gli uomini, nulla per se stesse dinotanti, onde, come a lor piace, può or questo or quel concetto esser da esse significato; e non avendo bruttezza o bellezza alcuna che sia lor propria e naturale, belle e brutte paiono secondo l'uso le giudica; il quale mutabilissimo essendo, necessario è che mutabili siano tutte le cose che da lui dependono. Tali in somma sono non solo il vestire e 'l parlare, ma tutte quelle che, con un nome comune, usanze si chiamano.<sup>18</sup>

As a result, Tasso is able to establish that the majority of judgments about poetry—that is, what makes poems beautiful or ugly—depends on attention to contemporary preferences.

However, Tasso also claims that judgments must be distinguished between declarations concerning "words" ("parole") and those concerning "things" ("cose"), which are both present in a poem. According to Tasso, words vary according to custom and are judged accordingly. For example, old words can sound ugly to modern ears ("suonano all'orecchie nostre un non so che di spiacevole").<sup>19</sup> Judgments of "things" can likewise be analyzed; however, "things" are also further divisible into two levels. First there are issues related to custom (such as rituals, decorum, representations of moral behavior).

<sup>16</sup> *Arte poetica*, pg. 34.

<sup>17</sup> *Arte poetica*, pg. 30.

<sup>18</sup> *Arte poetica*, pg. 30.

<sup>19</sup> *Arte poetica*, pg. 32.

Second, there exist certain matters which must be considered universally as they are established by nature ("immediatamente sovra la natura sono fondate").<sup>20</sup> Such matters are, by their very nature, unmediated by the "tyranny of custom" ("la tirannide dell'uso"), suggesting that judgments concerning their particular appearance in poetry must be made by appealing to reason.<sup>21</sup>

Within this last category of "natural things," Tasso lists certain universal types of behavior (such as those of children, the elderly, the rich, and the poor) and the unity of narrative.<sup>22</sup> According to Tasso, a unified plot, since it is "complete," universally produces more pleasure, regardless of time and place ("porta in sua natura bontà e perfezione nel poema, sì come in ogni secolo passato e futuro ha recato e recarà").<sup>23</sup> In other words, the language and narrative elements of chivalric romances must be judged according to current taste. Nevertheless, for Tasso, the lack of a unified structure is problematic.

Tasso concludes that this distinction between custom and nature has been "poorly understood" ("mal conosciuta") both by common people ("dal vulgo") and by learned men ("da alcuni dotti").<sup>24</sup> As a result, the search for modern epic has largely been confused through an undue focus on imitating or avoiding romance. Tasso reintroduces the problem of imitation, putting forward two examples of modern poets who err in either direction. First, he introduces Ariosto, whose works are read by all contemporary readers ("è letto e riletto da tutte l'età, da tutti i sessi, noto a tutte le lingue, piace a tutti, tutti il lodano, vive e ringiovinisce sempre nella sua fama, e vola glorioso per le lingue de' mortali").<sup>25</sup> Then he brings up Trissino, the poet who attempted to follow too closely the path of the ancients, Trissino, receiving a much less enthusiastic response:

i poemi d'Omero religiosamente si propose d'imitare e dentro i precetti d'Aristotele si ristrinse, mentovato da pochi, letto da pochissimi, prezato quasi da nissuno, muto nel teatro del mondo e morto alla luce de gli uomini, sepolto a pena nelle librerie e nello studio d'alcun letterato se ne rimane.<sup>26</sup>

Such a statement, despite its potential hyperbole, clearly sets out the stakes for a vernacular poet attempting epic. In Tasso's view, erudition and slavish imitation are decidedly not virtues and will only appeal to an extremely limited audience of intellectuals.

<sup>20</sup> *Arte poetica*, pg. 33.

<sup>21</sup> *Arte poetica*, pg. 33.

<sup>22</sup> Tasso explains that certain kinds of people, as outline by Aristotle in the second book of the *Rhetoric*, universally behave in standard ways. See *Arte poetica*, pg. 33.

<sup>23</sup> *Arte poetica*, pg. 33.

<sup>24</sup> *Arte poetica*, pg. 34.

<sup>25</sup> *Arte poetica*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>26</sup> *Arte poetica*, pg. 23.

Yet, rather than suggest that modern poets choose between classical models and contemporary ones, Tasso claims that lessons should be taken from both sides ("in alcune cose a gli antichi, in alcune a' moderni debbiamo assomigliarci").<sup>27</sup> Indeed, he offers a maxim as a way to orient future epic poets: "Vivi come vissero gli uomini antichi, e parla come oggidì si ragiona."<sup>28</sup> In this *motto* lies the entire problem facing vernacular epic poets. How does one successfully combine ancient forms of life with modern language?

In order to navigate this risky path, Tasso uses the emblematic figures of Ariosto and Trissino as examples of practices to avoid. Their two approaches to heroic poetry are central throughout the remainder of the *Discorsi dell'arte poetica*. Their poems become the two poles between which Tasso oscillates in order to define more clearly the requirements of epic.

#### 7.1.4 *Variety in Unity*

Tasso also revisits the theory of narrative multiplicity, the principal issue that seems to differentiate Ariosto and Trissino. Yet, Tasso takes issue with those writers who attribute Ariosto's popularity to "multiplicity," as if this mere formal characteristic was to determine the poems immense popularity. Tasso states his intention to refute this claim by turning back to the truth of poetic principles:

A questa ragione volendo io contradire, conviene che, per maggior intelligenza e chiarezza della verità, derivi da più alto principio il mio ragionamento.<sup>29</sup>

Out of this desire for a more coherent principle, Tasso thus derives an immutable aspect of heroic poetry, namely a unified plot.<sup>30</sup> In his view, such unity leads to the greatest pleasure in reading poetry. Yet, if this correlation between unity and pleasure is universal, why is Ariosto so popular and Trissino so ridiculed?

For Tasso, the *Furioso* is ultimately more popular than the *Italia liberata* because it contains a large number of pleasant themes, such as love, chivalry, adventures, and magic.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, the *Furioso* offers characters which are much more proper and decorous accord-

<sup>27</sup> *Arte poetica*, pg. 34.

<sup>28</sup> *Arte poetica*, pg. 30. Ultimately, for Tasso, the goal is to combine the "vaghezza d'invenzioni" and "decoro de' costumi" of romance with the unity of plot, and "la saldezza e 'l verisimile" of Homer and Virgil. See *Arte poetica*, pg. 34. This approach differs quite substantially with the claims of Bernardo, who wants to follow the invention and disposition of Homer, with the verse form of Ariosto.

<sup>29</sup> *Arte poetica*, pg. 30.

<sup>30</sup> Tasso also emphasizes the importance of "virtù," another universal and natural "thing" found in poetry.

<sup>31</sup> "[N]el Furioso si leggono amori, cavallerie, venture e incanti, e in somma invenzioni più vaghe e più accomodate alle nostre orecchie che quelle del Trissino non sono." *Arte poetica*, pg. 34.

ing to contemporary customs.<sup>32</sup> According to Tasso, these issues are not any more conducive to multiplicity than to unity.<sup>33</sup> Tasso thus implicitly criticizes previous theorists—such as Giraldi and Pigna—who were confined to a consideration of Ariosto's multiplicity as the origin of his popularity.

As is typical in Tasso's approach, this apparently unsolvable problem leads to a search for more fundamental principles from which to understand contemporary usage. For Tasso, the general insistence on multiplicity results from a general confusion of a more essential quality of human experience: an innate desire for difference. Tasso therefore distinguishes between the human drive for variety and the theoretical obsession with multiple plot lines:

essendo la nostra umanità composta di nature assai fra loro diverse, è necessario che d'una istessa cosa sempre non si compiaccia, ma con la diversità procuri or all'una or all'altra delle sue parti sodisfare, [...] questa è la varietà [...] in sua natura dilettevolissima.<sup>34</sup>

For Tasso, it is impossible to deny the pleasure derived from difference; in fact, he claims that to deny this would be "in contradiction with emotional experience" ("un contradire alla esperienza de' sentimenti").<sup>35</sup> He continues to appeal to experience, in opposition to poorly understood principles derived from Aristotle, as the best method for understanding not only poetry but pleasure more generally.

To clarify further the concept of "variety" in terms of psychological experience, Tasso introduces the concept of encountering different natural landscapes. For Tasso, deserts and impressive mountain ranges, though they may be typically horrifying, can also become a source of aesthetic pleasure once they are placed into contrast with the pleasantness of lakes and gardens: "la vista de' deserti e l'orrore e la rigidezza delle alpi ci piace doppo l'amenità de' laghi e de' giardini."<sup>36</sup> In other words, certain forms—though unpleasant in isolation—become aesthetically gratifying when placed within a larger sequence or structure.

There are two important points here. First, Tasso recasts the entire discussion of the unity of the plot in terms of the new concept of variety.<sup>37</sup> By doing so, he avoids the

<sup>32</sup> "[N]ella convenevolezza delle usanze e nel decoro attribuito alle persone molto più eccellente si dimostra il Furioso." *Arte poetica*, pg. 34.

<sup>33</sup> "...le quali invenzion non sono più determinate alla moltitudine che alla unità, ma in questa e in quella si possono egualmente ritrovare." *Arte poetica*, pg. 34.

<sup>34</sup> *Arte poetica*, pg. 35.

<sup>35</sup> *Arte poetica*, pg. 35.

<sup>36</sup> *Arte poetica*, pg. 35.

<sup>37</sup> Using the concept of variety, Tasso also describes changing literary tastes across time. In Greek Antiquity, there was apparently less need for variety, although by the time of Virgil it has become a greater force in

dead-end of the dichotomy that had been enraging so many previous writers and poets. For Tasso, the epic poet's task is no longer the production of multiplicity but the creation of variety in unity.<sup>38</sup> Tasso considers the strict interpreters of Aristotle as largely mistaken in their diagnosis of romance and epic.

Second, Tasso reframes the discussion of variety in terms of an essential characteristic of human psychology. By offering the example of the pleasure derived from seeing ordinarily horrific sights, Tasso situates his conceptualization of poetry within a larger theory of aesthetic experience. The experience of contrast provides enough pleasure to override a typically negative reaction to something like the horror of an immense desert. A similar discussion will emerge later in Tasso's theory of epic style, where conventionally unappealing sounds and structures become important due to their ability to provide this same aesthetic experience.<sup>39</sup>

## 7.2 LANGUAGES AND STYLES

To recapitulate, Tasso's method for analyzing epic poetry involves two fundamental and interrelated aspects. First, Tasso posits transhistorical principles for distinguishing different kinds of poetry, such as the concept of art as imitation and the absolute requirement of verisimilitude. Many of these principles rely on ideas drawn from the *Poetics* which are then refined according to a broader Aristotelian framework.<sup>40</sup> Second, Tasso interprets these principles in terms of historical change, which involves locating and articulating

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the composition of poetry. For Tasso, modern times ("nostri tempi") requires variety, a point which Trissino failed to see, thereby leading to a monotonous and uninteresting work: "Non era per avventura così necessaria questa varietà a' tempi di Virgilio e d'Omero, essendo gli uomini di quel secolo di gusto non così isvogliato; però non tanto v'attessero, benchè maggiore nondimeno in Virgilio che in Omero si ritrovi. Necessariissima era a' nostri tempi, e perciò dovea il Trissino co' sapori di questa varietà condire il suo poema, se voleva che da questi gusti sì delicati non fosse schivato; e se non tentò d'introdurlavi, o non conobbe il bisogno, o il disperò come impossibile." *Arte poetica*, pg. 35.

<sup>38</sup> This element of Tasso's thought has been thoroughly analyzed. This section leads to the description of the "picciolo mondo" that contains a wide variety of events, from battles on land and sea to famines to love, and so forth. For Tasso, the important distinction between multiplicity and variety in terms of narrative structure is that, deviations (or episodes) branching from the main plot are required, but they must also contribute to the overall movement of the plot. Thus, if one were to remove an episode it would ruin the whole structure. See Guido Baldassarri, "Introduzione ai 'Discorsi dell'arte poetica'," in *Studi tassiani*, 26, 1977, pp. 5-38.

<sup>39</sup> Within Tasso's distinctions there is a clear parallel with later discussions of the sublime and the beautiful. Traditionally, the origin of the interest in the sublime is Ps.-Longinus' treatise *On the Sublime*. While this text first became available in various forms in Tasso's period, he did not read it. He did, however, read and rely heavily on Demetrius' *On Style*, while presents similar characteristics to *On the Sublime*. A more expansive study of this particular concept, especially in the early modern period, is necessary.

<sup>40</sup> By this, I mean simply that Tasso's understanding of the *Poetics* is mediated by his larger understanding of Aristotelian natural philosophy. As a result, he makes use of a vocabulary taken from other Aristotelian tracts, such as matter and form. This approach is not unique to Tasso, but he appears to be the most consistent.

cultural difference over time. As a result, he is able to situate works from different literary traditions under the same principle while also considering the ideologies and schemes of appreciation required for the success of those works within their historical context. The pagan gods are admissible in Greco-Roman Antiquity primarily because the majority of people believed in that specific reality. Some modern poets have attempted to recreate the world of the pagan gods, such as Trissino, but this artistic decision has led to failure. Ultimately, Tasso establishes criteria for evaluating and producing an epic poem based on the work's adherence to generic principles as well as prevailing socio-cultural attitudes and sensibilities.

### 7.2.1 *Love and War*

By relating different literary works to an ideal conception and an empirical reality, Tasso is able to articulate the failures of both the contemporary poets Trissino and Ariosto. For Tasso, these poets become practical examples of one or the other side of the principle-custom dialectic; however, due to their extreme position, they also become emblematic of a certain kind of artistic failure. Trissino fails because he attempted to reproduce as exactly as possible the poems of Antiquity, without taking into consideration contemporary expectations and usage. Ariosto fails because he has produced a wildly popular work, but he has also introduced an artistic practice—namely narrative multiplicity—that falls short of the ideal of variety in unity.

For Tasso, multiplicity has largely been a red herring for contemporary thinkers, who have associated it exclusively with the vernacular. This issue provides Tasso with the opportunity to discuss differences between the vernacular and classical languages, including issues of multiplicity, as well as more general problems of aesthetic range.

Tasso disagrees entirely with the notion that Latin literature tends towards the production of unified narratives, while the vernacular is predisposed to multiplicity (“[I]o per me non posso conoscere la cagione che l’unità dell’azioni sia propria de’ latini poemi e la moltitudine de’ vulgari”).<sup>41</sup> This disagreement leads Tasso to refer to typical points made by earlier thinkers concerning the linguistic and aesthetic ranges of both Latin and the vernacular. Other writers, he claims, have been led to believe that the vernacular, apart from being predisposed to multiplicity, also tends to sing exclusively of love due to the predominance of vowel sounds.

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<sup>41</sup> *Arte poetica*, pg 29.



Nè per aventura cagione alcuna se ne può rendere: chè se essi a me diranno per qual cagione le materie della guerra sono stimate più proprie della latina, e l'amorose della toscana, risponderai che ciò si dice avvenire per le molte consonanti della latina e per la lunghezza del suo essametro, più atte allo strepito delle armi e alla guerra, e per le vocali della toscana e per l'armonia delle rime, più convenevole alla piacevolezza de gli affetti amorosi.<sup>42</sup>

Here we return to a familiar dichotomy: Latin is associated with matters of war, consonants, and the length of hexameter, while the vernacular seems limited to matters of love, vowels, the harmony of rhymes.

For Tasso, different languages *are* more predisposed to certain forms of poetry: Greek can more easily describe the world in intricate detail, while Latin possesses a more sonorous majesty:

Non nego io che ciascuno idioma non abbia alcune cose proprie di lui [...] È la lingua greca molto atta alla espressione d'ogni minuta cosa; a questa istessa espressione inetta è la latina, ma molto più capace di grandezza e di maestà; e la nostra lingua toscana, se bene con egual suono nella descrizione delle guerre non ci riempie gli orecchi, con maggior dolcezza nondimeno nel trattare le passioni amorose ce le lusinga.<sup>43</sup>

Tasso thus makes the point that Latin and the vernacular share a similar sound, although Latin more easily "fills the ears" while the vernacular tends towards "sweetness." However, despite the fact that these languages possess different aesthetic tendencies, Tasso finds that there is no reason that one language cannot express all subject matters. Indeed, he concludes that an excellent poet can easily sing of war in the vernacular: "[M]a non però queste materie sono in guisa proprie di questi idiomi che l'armi nella toscana e gli amori nella latina non possano convenevolmente esserci espresse da eccellente poeta."<sup>44</sup> Doubtless Tasso is the excellent poet in question.

Tasso's problem now seems to be: how does one produce a vernacular poem that "fills the ears"? And how does one mitigate the natural sweetness of the vernacular? As we shall see, it is not a question of inventing new metrical schemes, but of expanding the expressive range of currently accepted options while remaining within the bounds of *ottava rima*. Once the general principles that structure aesthetic epic experience have been established, the issue becomes one of determining the specifically vernacular instantiations that produce those effects. Due to this emphasis on the relationship between type of language and aesthetic effect, the framework for undertaking such an investigation must necessarily be stylistic in nature.

<sup>42</sup> *Arte poetica*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>43</sup> *Arte poetica*, pg. 29.

<sup>44</sup> *Arte poetica*, pg. 30.

## 7.2.2 Tasso's Theory of Style

Tasso approaches the issue of epic language in much the same way as he investigates epic poetry. He establishes general principles, derived from a classical authority, which he then attempts to articulate in terms of the specific qualities of the vernacular. Such an operation entails the establishment of models—particularly negative models—which allow for the further refinement of the vernacular instantiation of those principles. In the case of style, Tasso relies on a specific tradition of rhetoric, that of post-Aristotelian Hellenistic rhetoric, in order to locate the kind of language necessary for epic poetry. It is from this tradition, and more specifically from the treatise *On Style* (*De elocutione*) by Demetrius that Tasso conceives of epic language as a productive of a specific aesthetic experience, that of wonder (“meraviglia”). This approach and these sources are entirely new to the epic discussion. None of the previous authors conceptualize either epic or epic style in this manner.

Tasso developed his views on epic style while at the same time composing the *Liberata*, a process which lasted well into the 1570s. We will therefore expand our investigation to several works beyond the *Discorsi dell'arte poetica* (1562-64). We will also look at his lecture on the poet Giovanni Della Casa (ca. 1568), his treatise on several poems by Giambattista Pigna (ca. 1572), and finally the so-called *Lettere poetiche*, an epistolary exchange between Tasso and several revisers of the final draft of his epic in 1575-76. We will also look at examples from the *Liberata* itself, taken mainly from the seventh and ninth cantos.

To begin, the last book of the *Discorsi dell'arte poetica* explicitly addresses style, which Tasso defines as the combination of concepts (“concetti”), words (“parole”), and the arrangement of words (“le composizioni de le parole”).<sup>45</sup> Following a largely Roman rhetorical tripartite division, Tasso further divides style into three types: the magnificent or sublime (“sublime”), the middle (“mediocre”), and the humble (“umile”), each of which employs different kinds of concepts, words, and composition.

According to Tasso, the sublime or magnificent style is appropriate for epic poetry for two reasons. First, following the same logic seen in earlier writers, elevated themes demand that poets use a similarly distinguished style. Second, since the goal of epic poetry is the production of wonder (“meraviglia”), only the sublime style is appropriate as it too generates the same response:

<sup>45</sup> Immediately Tasso claims that “stile” means “quel composto che risulta da’ concetti e da le voci.” Later he breaks down this second component to “da’ concetti, da le parole e da le composizioni de le parole.” See *Arte poetica*, pg. 43.

[La forma magnifica] è convenevole al poema eroico per due ragioni. Prima, perché le cose altissime, che si piglia a trattare l'epico, devono con altissimo stile essere trattate. La seconda, perché ogni parte opera a quel fine che opera il suo tutto: ma lo stile è parte del poema epico, adunque lo stile opera a quel fine che opera il poema epico; il quale, come s'è detto, ha per fine la maraviglia.<sup>46</sup>

Tasso clearly belongs to the same rhetorically-inflected tradition seen throughout our study. This approach emphasizes the correspondence between subject matter and manner of expression. At the same time, Tasso is also able to provide a new emphasis. In his view, the reader's experience of the proper relationship of theme and form is productive of a specific emotion, wonder.

For Tasso, the other two styles of the low and medium are aimed at different effects. The humble style, used for simple ideas, is meant to teach, while the middle style, even though it may rely on unusual ornamental language, produces mainly delight: "proprio del magnifico dicitore è il commuovere e il rapire gli animi, come de l'umile l'insegnare, e del temperato il dilettere." The goal of the sublime style is to move the soul ("commuovere gli animi").<sup>47</sup> Compared with all previous authors, Tasso's understanding of epic style is unique in that, in addition to the general rhetorical notion of stylistic convenience, he emphasizes the role of language in an aesthetic experience.<sup>48</sup> Tasso's stylistic project therefore involves identifying the concepts and corresponding uses of language that produce wonder.

It is clear from the opening paragraph of this section of Tasso's *Arte poetica* that the vernacular lacks a proper model for the sublime style. He makes the point that each of the three styles can be mixed together in an epic poem, but it is necessary for the sublime style to dominate. The only poet that seems to have achieved this balance is Virgil, while the only two possible examples in the vernacular—Trissino and Ariosto—tend to rely on the other two styles, namely the low and the middle:

<sup>46</sup> *Arte poetica*, pg. 43.

<sup>47</sup> *Arte poetica*, pg. 43.

<sup>48</sup> The tripartite division into teaching, delighting, and moving comes from classical rhetoric, namely Cicero. Tasso, however, is the first of the writers examining epic language to associate one of the three means of persuasion with the goal of epic poetry. We find a similar connection between styles and modes of persuasion in Speroni's *Dialogo della retorica*, when his character Antonio Brocardo discusses the three kinds of oratory: "io ebbi in animo di congiungere insieme i tre stili, le tre cause, e i tre modi del persuadere con le tre parti d'orazione; in maniera che alla invenzione il movimento nella causa giudiciale con lo stil grande principalmente corrispondesse, ma alla disposizion l'insegnare nella causa deliberativa con lo stil basso, ultimamente il diletto alla elocuzione nella cuasa dimostrativa con lo stile mezzano propriamente si riferisse. Il quale ordine da tutti i retori, così Greci come Latini, essere stato osservato." Sperone Speroni (1740). *Opere*. Ed. by N. Delle Laste and M. Forcellini. Vol. 5 vols. Venice: Domenico Occhi, I, pp. 216-17.

Il magnifico, dunque, conviene al poema epico come suo proprio; dico suo proprio, perché avendo ad usare anco gli altri secondo l'occorrenze e le materie, come accuratissimamente si vede in Virgilio, questo nondimeno è quello che prevale; come la terra in questi nostri corpi, composti nondimeno di tutti i quattro. Lo stile del Trissino, per signoreggiare per tutto il dimesso, dimesso potrà esser detto; quello dell'Ariosto, per la medesima ragione, mediocre.<sup>49</sup>

Trissino and Ariosto thus continue to function as negative models for Tasso. Trissino is too simple, and Ariosto is too lyrical. For Tasso, the goals and techniques of both of these styles depart substantially from those of the sublime style.

In terms of the three components, the humble style is primarily a form of language that remains as close to common use ("uso comune") as possible.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, the middle style, though it departs from such common use, nevertheless uses flowery ornamentation in order to delight rather than move.<sup>51</sup> In practical terms, neither Trissino nor Ariosto should serve as proper models for the sublime style, which Tasso believes has yet to be explored fully in the vernacular.

### 7.2.3 *Demetrius of Phalereus*

Before turning to the specific elements of this style, however, it is worth explaining the origin of this particular approach to style. In reality, Tasso relies on a combination of Aristotelian thought and the precepts outlined in the treatise *On Style* by Demetrius. Noticeably absent is any reference to the *Poetics*, such as the discussion of language as turgid and stable. Indeed, the only salient feature from the *Poetics* seems to be the notion that

49 *Arte poetica*, pg. 43. Several times throughout this section, Tasso identifies overly lyrical moments in Ariosto: "[A]venga che l'umile alcuna volta ne l'eroico sia dicevole, non vi si converrà però l'umile, che è proprio del comico, come fece l'Ariosto quando disse: Ch'a dire il vero, egli ci avea la gola. [...] E in quegli altri: E dicea il ver; ch'era viltade espressa [...] Parlari, per dire il vero, troppo popolareschi sono quelli, e questi inclinati a la bassezza comica per la disonesta cosa che si rappresenta, disconvenevole sempre a l'eroico. E benché sia più convenevolezza tra il lirico e l'epico, nondimeno troppo inclinò a la mediocrità lirica in quelli: La verginella è simile a la rosa, ecc. [...] Onde è tassato l'Ariosto, ch' usasse simili concetti nel suo Furioso troppo lirici, come: Amor che m'arde il cor, fa questo vento ecc." *ibid*, pg. 41.

50 "[U]mile sarà il concetto, se sarà quale a punto suol nascere ne gli animi de gli uomini ordinariamente, e non atto ad indurre maraviglia, ma più tosto a l'insegnare accomodato. Umile sarà l'elocuzione, se le parole saranno proprie, non peregrine, non nove, non straniere, poche traslate, e quelle, non con quell'ardire che al magnifico si conviene. Pochi epiteti e più tosto necessari che per ornamento. Umile sarà la composizione, se brevi saranno i periodi e i membri; se l'orazione non avrà tante copule; ma facile se ne correrà secondo l'uso comune, senza trasportare nomi o verbi; se i versi saranno senza rottura, se le desinenze non saranno troppo scelte." *Arte poetica*, pg. 46.

51 "I concetti e l' elocuzione di questa forma sono quelli che eccedono l'uso comune di ciascuno, ma non portano però tanto di forza e di nerbo, quanto ne la magnifica si richiede. E quello in che eccede particolarmente l'ordinario modo di favellare, è la va ghezza ne gli esatti e fioriti ornamenti de' concetti e de l'elocuzioni, e ne la dolcezza e soavità de la composizione; e tutte quelle figure d'una accurata e industriosa diligenza, le quali non ardisce di usare l'umile dicitore, né degna il magnifico, sono dal mediocre poste in opera." *Arte poetica*, pg. 47.

epic should aim to produce wonder. Tasso's focus is on the schematic breakdown of styles as set forth by Demetrius' treatise, with occasional references to other post-Aristotelian Hellenistic rhetoricians such as Hermogenes and Dionysius of Halicarnassus.

The absolute priority of Demetrius in Tasso's thoughts on epic language appears throughout not only in his various discussions of style, but even in the last of his *Lettere poetiche*, where he justifies his stylistic choices to his censors. In May, 1576, in response to criticisms about the language of his poem, Tasso writes that he reread Demetrius in order to reassure himself of his stylistic decisions: "Ho riletto, per assicurarmi maggiormente, la Poetica d'Aristotele e insieme Demetrio Falereo, il quale parla più che alcun altro esattamente dello stile, e mi sono risoluto intorno a molte opinioni."<sup>52</sup> Tasso claims that, despite the criticisms put forward by his revisers, he believes that he has successfully transplanted into the vernacular the various linguistic forms of classical writers.

Ma, cominciando da quelle che appartengono allo stile, tutte o gran parte delle forme di dire e delle parole, le quali sono state da me trapiantate nel mio poema da' buoni libri antichi, delibero di lasciarvele; e credo che sian per recare a me riputazione e splendore e maestà al poema. Dico a lungo andare: ché forse in questi principii molti, leggendole, torceranno il grifo.<sup>53</sup>

Much like the previous authors we have seen, from Trissino to Bolognetti, there is an intense awareness that any attempt to reproduce classical forms may produce a negative response from his readers ("torceranno il grifo"). Tasso believes, however, that his peculiar stylistic choices, though they may cause some initial consternation, are nevertheless appropriate and should be left in the poem.

In another letter, Tasso defends his potentially problematic linguistic choices. More importantly, he claims that his various statements on language and style derive from his experiences as a practicing poet, not merely as a theoretician: "Tutto questo ho detto non solo come teorico, ma come pratico ancora."<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Letter XLVI to S. Gonzaga, dated May 22nd, 1576. See Torquato Tasso, *Lettere poetiche*. Ed. Carla Molinari. Parma: U. Guanda, 1995, pg. 433. In reality, Tasso sees Demetrius as being specifically Aristotelian: "Nè si maravigli s'io propongo Demetrio; perch'egli uscì da la scuola de' peripatetici, da la quale io son uscito più tosto che da quella de' retori." See *Lettere poetiche*, pg. 449, note.

<sup>53</sup> *Lettere poetiche*, pg. 433.

<sup>54</sup> *Lettere poetiche*, pg. 455. In this same letter, Tasso also introduces an interesting notion that has yet to receive sustained analysis, that of the necessity of "ornamento" in the creation of an epic style. He writes, regarding classical epic language, "Son molti e molti altri modi di dire, che son propri del magnifico et inalzan lo stile senza esquisito ornamento. Or non avendo la nostra lingua molti di questi modi, che dee fare il magnifico dicitor toscano? Quei soli c'ha ricevuti la lingua non bastano per aventura. Certo o accattar molte figure e molti modi dalla mediocre forme o dalla umile. Della umile è propria passion, per così dire, la purità; della mediocre, l'ornamento." *Lettere poetiche*, pp. 451-52. Further analysis is warranted in this regard, although it lies outside the scope of the present study.

We will begin by asking what Tasso means when he says he transplanted modes of speech from classical works into his poem. We can begin by following Tasso's own division of style into three components: concepts, words, and composition. First, there are concepts, which in the case of the sublime style are fairly straightforward. Any discussion of god, the world, heroes, and battles are all moments for the sublime style. In the *Arte poetica*, he writes, "La magnificenza de' concetti sarà, se si tratterà di cose grandi; come di Dio, del mondo, de gli eroi, di battaglie terrestri, navali e simili." Later, in his lecture on Della Casa he will repeat this point: "cominciando da' concetti, Demetrio Falereo con queste precise parole ne parla: «È ne' concetti la magnificenza, se di alcuna grande ed illustre battaglia navale o terrestre, o del cielo o della terra, si ragiona»." <sup>55</sup>

Crucial to understanding Tasso's discussion of style is the fact that an entire poem should not be written in the sublime style. Nor does he reject the use of either of the two other two forms. Tasso's contribution to the discussion that we have been tracing over three decades is the articulation of a type of language used in specifically epic moments in a poem, that is, battles, God, and nature. <sup>56</sup>

What we will now analyze is Tasso's theory of the language used to express properly these specifically epic themes. We will follow the sequence provided by Tasso himself, one which reappears with regularity throughout his theoretical works. First, we will look at **diction** and its relationship to the more general aesthetic principle of wonder. From there we move to composition, which will be divided into two elements: **syntax** and **sound**.

### 7.3 "L'UCCELLO, IL QUALE OVE MEN TEME, IVI PIÙ SPESSO È COLTO"

Tasso begins his discussion of the grand style by emphasizing the relationship between the language of the work and the goal of epic, namely the production of wonder: "[M]a lo stile è parte del poema epico, adunque lo stile opera a quel fine che opera il poema epico; il quale, come s'è detto, ha per fine la maraviglia, la quale nasce solo da le cose sublimi e

<sup>55</sup> Torquato Tasso, *Le prose diverse*. Ed. Cesare Guasti. Florence: Successori Le Monnier, 1875, vol 2., pg. 120. In *On Style*, Demetrius writes, "Elevation resides also in the nature of the subject-matter, when (for instance) the subject is a great and famous battle on land or sea, or when earth or heaven is the theme. The man who listens to a great subject is promptly beguiled into thinking that the discourse itself is great. 'Beguiled,' I say: for we must consider not so much the things narrated as the method of their narration, since great topics may be handled in a manner that is mean and below the dignity of the subject-matter." See Demetrius and W. Rhys Roberts. *On Style*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907, section 75.

<sup>56</sup> This point is identical to the one that will be made later by Monteverdi concerning the development of Italian music. He writes that up until his intervention, music was focused on two previous emotions and had yet to understand an important, though absent passion, that of anger.

magnifiche.”<sup>57</sup> While in the first book of the *Arte poetica*, Tasso introduces the problem of incorporating “wonders” (“meraviglie”) or “the wondrous” (“il meraviglioso”) into the narrative, here he has reframed the problem as a type of response to certain experiences.<sup>58</sup> Tasso distinguishes between “wonders” understood in an objective sense (e.g. angelic or demonic forces), and “wonder” as a psychological state engendered in a person by an encounter with “sublime and magnificent things.”

It is also apparent that style plays an important role in mediating between such “things” and the necessary “response” of reading and epic. Tasso returns to the problem that has plagued writers since the beginning of the sixteenth century: what sort of language corresponds to, or best expresses, a given subject matter? In Tasso’s formulation, the question appears to be more specific: what elements of style best produce a sense of wonder? His approach relies on various rhetorical and stylistic strategies, from the manipulation of syntax to the creation of dissonant sounds. Before turning to the specifics, let us consider first the issue of “wonder” and its relationship to an ideal reader. As we shall see, Tasso’s conception of “maraviglia” leads to a theory of style at odds with previous writers due to his emphasis on the strange, the unusual, and the artificial.

Although he does not address “maraviglia” in a sustained theoretical manner in the rest of the *Arte poetica*, Tasso frequently alludes to the specific psychological state that epic language should produce. For instance, when turning to the problem of creating stylistic “grandezza,” he lists rhetorical figures that enliven this subject matter, such as amplification, hyperbole, reticence, and prosopopoeia.<sup>59</sup> These figures are important because they deviate from the daily habits of thought of ordinary men.

Per esprimere questa grandezza accomodate saranno quelle figure di sentenze [...] che non caggiono così di leggieri ne le menti de gli uomini ordinari, e che sono atte ad indurvi la meraviglia.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Discorsi dell’arte poetica, pg. 40.

<sup>58</sup> The scholarship on “wonders” in Tasso is quite extensive; however, the majority of works tend to focus on the “wondrous” (“il meraviglioso”) rather than on “wonder” as a psychological issue. See, for instance, Guido Baldassarri, *Inferno e cielo: tipologia e funzione del meraviglioso nella Liberata*. Rome: Bulzoni, 1977.

<sup>59</sup> “Quelle figure di sentenze, le quali o fanno parer grandi le cose con le circostanze; come l’ampliazione e le iperboli, che alzano la cosa sopra il vero; o la reticenza, che accennando la cosa, e poi tacendola, maggiore la lascia a l’imaginatione; o la prosopopeia, che con la finzione di persone d’autorità e riverenza dà autorità e riverenza a la cosa...” *Discorsi dell’arte poetica*, pg. 43.

<sup>60</sup> *Discorsi dell’arte poetica*, pg. 43. This discussion of both figures of speech and wonder appears to derive from Demetrius, who twice refers to the need to avoid ordinary language in the elevated style. At one point, the Greek rhetorician begins to discuss the appropriate “figures” (“schemata”) for each style. He suggests figures such as “anthypallage” which is a form of language that does not occur normally in speech. He concludes, “[E]verything ordinary is trivial, and so fails to win admiration.” See *On Style*, sections 59-60. Vettori translates Demetrius’ topic as “figurae locutionis.” His Latin rendition of this last sentence reads, “omne autem quod consuetudine fit pusillum est. unde vacuum ab admiratione.” See *Petri Victorii commentarii in librum Demetrii Phalerei de elocutione*. Florence: Bernardo Giunti, 1562, pg. 57-58. The phrase “vacuum ab

Tasso thus refines the notion of the appropriateness of epic language by shifting from discussing the wonder that emerges naturally from the contemplation of sublime themes to the wonder that occurs due to unfamiliar conceits and language.

Tasso further associates wonder and unfamiliar language with one of the three modes of persuasion as outlined by traditional rhetoric: to teach, to delight, and to move. He claims that writers in the sublime style must "move" their listeners and "seize" their souls:

Perciò che così proprio del magnifico dicitore è il commuovere e il rapire gli animi, come de l'umile l'insegnare, e del temperato il dilettere; ancora che e ne l'essere mosso e ne l'esser insegnato trovi il lettore qualche diletto.<sup>61</sup>

Tasso is careful to explain that "seizing the soul" of the reader should not be viewed as an unpleasant experience. Much like other post-Trissinian theorists, he is attentive to the need for the poet to produce some form of pleasure ("qualche diletto").

Tasso elaborates on this point by analyzing the other two styles as well. He claims that the humble style is born of conceits that occur in the minds of men ordinarily ("ordinariamente"). By necessity, something ordinary is "not suitable to inspire wonder" ("non atto ad indurre maraviglia").<sup>62</sup> On the other hand, the rhetorical figures of middle style *do* surpass common usage ("eccedono l'uso comune"); however, they lack the "force" ("forza") and "nerve" ("nerbo") of the sublime style.<sup>63</sup> Instead, the epic poet, in order to achieve elevation of style, must use foreign words ("parole straniere"), metaphors ("traslate"), and more generally abnormal language ("quelle che proprie non saranno").<sup>64</sup>

Tasso is thus able to tie his theory of epic style directly to Aristotle's *Poetics*, where the Stagyrte recommends the use of "rare words" and "metaphors" within epic.<sup>65</sup> In reality, while the *Poetics* approached this issue from the perspective of heroic meter, Tasso has

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admiratione" derives from a much more condensed term *athaumaston*. This use of *admiratio* and *thaumaston* warrants a more extended analysis that would go beyond the scope of the current analysis. Demetrius also turns to diction, which he claims should also echo the extraordinary character of the subject matter. "The diction used in this style should be grandiose, elaborate, and distinctly out of the ordinary. It will thus possess the needed gravity, whereas usual and current words, though clear, are unimpressive and liable to be held cheap." See *On Style*, section 77. Tasso, following Demetrius, thus also emphasizes the need to be "out of the ordinary." Tasso mirrors the conventional rhetorical move expressed in Demetrius of fitting the quality of language to the quality of the subject matter.

<sup>61</sup> *Arte poetica*, pg. 42.

<sup>62</sup> *Arte poetica*, pg. 46.

<sup>63</sup> *Arte poetica*, pg. 47.

<sup>64</sup> He writes specifically, "Nasce il sublime e'l peregrino ne l'elocuzione da le parole straniere, da le traslate e da tutte quelle che proprie non saranno." *Arte poetica*, pg. 44.

<sup>65</sup> "Experience has shown that the heroic hexameter is the right metre. Were anyone to write a narrative poem in any other metre or in several metres, the effect would be wrong. The hexameter is the most sedate and stately of all metres and therefore admits of rare words and metaphors more than others, and narrative poetry is itself elaborate above all others." *Poetics*, 1459b. Cited from Aristotle, *Art of Poetry*, trans. W.H. Fyfe. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940.



incorporated “rare words” and “metaphors” into a larger rhetorical framework.<sup>66</sup> While authors such as Giraldis and Pigna seemed uncertain about interpreting this passage from Aristotle, Tasso subsumes it within the larger problem of producing wonder. In this way, he is able to establish the general principles of epic style, much in the same way he derived the principles of epic narrative as seen in the earlier books of the *Arte poetica*.

How does he Tasso adapt the concept of “uncommon” or “foreign” language to the specific and historical character of the vernacular? As with the discussion of Tasso’s general poetics, we must look at his views of an ideal audience. From there we will be able to see that, much like his theory of subject matter, the poet must attend to general expectations in order to determine an acceptable degree of unfamiliarity. Without an awareness of such expectations (i.e. verisimilitude), the entire project would fall apart.

### 7.3.1 *The Average Reader*

Tasso’s discussion of an ideal audience appears throughout his discussions of epic style, including his lecture on Della Casa and in his letters. He frequently refers to an average reader that is neither particularly learned nor especially stupid. In his lecture on Della Casa, for instance, Tasso writes that the poet should appeal not only to the learned (“i dotti”) but to a more general “people” (“al popolo”). Yet, he also makes a crucial distinction between language used by people and language intelligible to people:

Parla il poeta non a i dotti solo, ma al popolo, come l’oratore; e però siano i suoi concetti popolari: popolari chiamo non quai il popolo gli usa ordinariamente, ma tali, che al popolo siano intelligibili: ed è l’effetto dell’eloquenza, come dice Marco Tullio, l’applauso della moltitudine.<sup>67</sup>

Tasso thus distinguishes between common usage and common understanding, the latter of which is potentially greater and more accommodating of a wider variety of linguistic use.

In a letter to Scipione Gonzaga dated July 16th, 1575, Tasso writes that he never intended to appeal to either the stupid masses (“il vulgo stupido”) nor to the masters of the art (“i maestri dell’arte”). Instead, he seeks the applause of “average men” (“uo-

<sup>66</sup> This incorporation occurs largely through the mediation of Demetrius’ *On Style*, as should be clear. For a more extended analysis of Tasso’s use of Demetrius, see Hermann Grosser, *La sottigliezza del disputare: teorie degli stili e teorie dei generi in età rinascimentale e nel Tasso*. Florence: Nuova Italia, 1992.

<sup>67</sup> *Prose*, II, pg. 124.

mini mediocri").<sup>68</sup> In other words, Tasso wants his poem to be intelligible to the majority of readers and listeners. Indeed, Tasso even asks Gonzaga about the opinion of the "courtiers" ("cortigiani") and "average men" ("uomini mezzani") who had heard a recent recitation of the *Liberata*.<sup>69</sup> This position differs substantially from the elitist positions of previous authors from Trissino to Bolognetti, whose ideal audience appears to be an extremely limited group of erudite readers. Tasso, by contrast, appears to be sensitive to the general expectations of an average, which allows him to establish a basis for producing unfamiliar stylistic effects.

This basis appears in Tasso's discussion of using foreign words. For Tasso, the proper use of foreign words can only be understood by the degree to which the words differ from the vernacular. Indeed, there must be a certain level of similarity with one's own language:

Le parole straniere devono essere tratte da quelle lingue che similitudine hanno con la nostra, come la provenzale, la francesca e la spagnuola. A queste io aggiungo la latina, pure che a loro si dia la terminazione de la favella toscana.<sup>70</sup>

The importance of similarity ("similitudine") echoes the same principle of credibility (and verisimilitude) seen earlier in his general theory of poetry. For Tasso, if a word is entirely unfamiliar, the effect is lost.

Tasso elaborates more extensively on this point in his later *Discorsi del poema eroico*, where he explains the function of "parole peregrine":

[il] parlare ne' poeti [è] più sublime che ne gli oratori, ma non già proprio: perché i poeti, come dice Marco Tullio, parlarono quasi con lingua aliena. [...] le parole proprie fanno l'orazione piana, ma non ornata, e gli altri nomi, i quali più convengono al poeta, le accrescono ornamento, e particolarmente le parole disusate la fanno più venerabile, perché sono come forestieri tra' cittadini: laonde paiono peregrine e producono meraviglia.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>68</sup> "Io non mi proposi mai di piacere al vulgo stupido, ma non vorrei però solamente sodisfare a i maestri dell'arte. Anzi sono ambiziosissimo dell'applauso de gli uomini mediocri; e quasiché altrettanto affetto la buona opinione di questi tali quanto quella de' più intendenti." *Lettere poetiche*, Letter XIX, pg. 167.

<sup>69</sup> "[Il] parere de' cortigiani galanti e de gli uomini mezzani." *Lettere poetiche*, pg. 167. Despite this request, in another letter, we also find Tasso admitting that he hopes that his poetry will impress those who understand the poetic arts, "Quel che mi scrive Vostra Signoria del molto piacere con che da molti è letto il mio poema ha recato a me infinito diletto: pur io desiderarei d'intendere più particolarmente di qual ordine d'uomini siano costoro a cui tanto piace; perché, a confessarle il vero, io ho sempre sperato d'avere a sodisfare a i versati nelli studi poetici, et il mio dubbio era solo intorno a gli altri." *Lettere poetiche*, Letter XXI to S. Gonzaga, July 29th, 1575, pg. 173

<sup>70</sup> Tasso largely repeats this same point in his later *Discorsi del poema eroico*, although he has strangely removed Provençal from his list: "Ma quella sarà grave, la quale userà vocaboli affatto peregrini. Peregrini chiama Aristotele la varietà de le lingue, l'accorciamento e l'allungamento, e ciascuno altro nome che non sia proprio. [...] I nomi dunque stranieri e i traslati e gli ornati e l'altre forme potranno fare il parlare non umile, ma sublime." See *Discorsi del poema eroico*, ed. Poma, pg. 181.

<sup>71</sup> *Poema eroico*, pg. 181.

He continues to emphasize the relationship between an odd—even “alien”—poetic language and the effect of wonder.<sup>72</sup> It should not be obscure, otherwise it would be unintelligible. Just as plausibility is the necessary condition for subject matter and narrative logic, so too on the level of language, the creation of sensations with language requires a level of familiarity on the reader’s part.

There are two points to emphasize here, one theoretical and one related to contemporary positions on the use of foreign languages. First, the necessary similarity between a foreign word and the vernacular is analogous to Tasso’s earlier discussion of the choice of ideal subject matter for an epic poem. Tasso everywhere emphasizes the need to adhere as closely as possible to the current beliefs of one’s contemporary audience, from the choice of religion to the historical proximity of the events. If there is no point of contact between the events described in the poem and the reader’s own culture, there is a resultant diminished efficacy. Likewise, in matters of language, if there is no air of familiarity between the foreign word employed and the reader’s own language, the effect of evoking wonder is lost.<sup>73</sup>

### 7.3.2 *The Effect of Wonder*

We can expand the notion of wonder further, beyond simply strange or foreign words, to a more general principle of the unexpected, which is determined not only by larger cultural expectations, but by the logic of the narrative and by the creation of a familiar language. This conception of wonder, as an intended effect produced in the mind of the reader, appears most clearly in a metaphor for Tasso’s dialogue *La Cavaletta*, composed by the mid 1580s.

In this dialogue, Tasso’s alter ego, the Neapolitan Stranger, comments on the necessity for a poet to establish readerly expectations in order to break them more effectively. In-

<sup>72</sup> Note here the insistence on the production of “ornamento,” as mentioned in note 49 above. *Ornamento* should be understood as more than something merely added, but rather a fundamental modification to language that moves it out of common usage (“uso comune”).

<sup>73</sup> The tenuous balance between the potentially alienating use of “foreign” words and the need for a proper aesthetic experience appears in Tasso’s own letters. In his correspondence with his revisers in the mid 1570s, he constantly apologizes for his excessive use of Latin words, promising to moderate his stylistic tendencies. For example, in a letter to Scipione Gonzaga from April 13th, 1575, he writes, “Dubito ancora di non esser alquanto licenzioso nelle voci latine; però quelle che si potranno tòr via senza scemar la maestà, sarà ben fatto che si tolgano.” Letter IV, pg. 25. In another letter from later that year to Luca Scalabrino, he even offers specific examples of Latinisms, “Rimovo alcune parole latine, ‘lustrì’, ‘insta’, ‘prorompere’; e muto alcun’altre cosette a mio gusto.” See, *Lettere poetiche*, Letter XXX, October 15th, 1575, pg. 282. It is clear, however, that Tasso is attempting to balance between the use of strange words, which produce “majesty” (“maestà”) and the need for a more acceptable style.

deed, the Neapolitan Stranger compares the reader and the listener to a domesticated bird which has been set free, only to be shot down by an arrow when it least expects it:

E sì può l'auditore o 'l lettore, mentre egli sì spazia per le dilettevoli rime, assomigliar a l'uccello, il quale ove men teme, ivi più spesso è colto: perciocchè molte volte è colpito dal poeta nel principio e nel mezzo de' componimenti, ove se n'ha minor suspizione. [...] E peravventura sì come ebbe il premio nel saettare colui, il quale colse la colomba già disciolta; così quel poeta il merita, il quale non legando l'ascoltatore con le sue regole, saetta a segno incerto con maraviglia maggiore.<sup>74</sup>

In Tasso's view, the poet must carefully distribute the use of impressive figures by always keeping in mind where the reader would have the "least suspicion" ("minor suspizione"). Such distribution must not be so regular as to produce expectations within the work itself. Tasso claims, the poet must avoid giving the reader a sense of discovering his "rules" ("le sue regole").

Ultimately, for Tasso, the greatest wonder ("maraviglia maggiore") appears to rely on the same principles of variety and verisimilitude found previously in Tasso's general poetics. Tasso appears everywhere to conceive of his craft as necessarily understanding expectations, both in terms of contemporary culture as well as within the work itself.

Aware that his stylistic choices may seem strange, Tasso expects that his poetry will be poorly received, at least initially. In a letter to Scipione Gonzaga, he writes, "[C]redo che sian per recare a me riputazione e splendore e maestà al poema. Dico a lungo andare: ché forse in questi principii molti, leggendole, torceranno il grifo."<sup>75</sup> This statement about poor reception echoes virtually all of the previous writers, from Trissino onwards, who acknowledge that their attempts to introduce new forms into the vernacular may require an initial period of adjustment. As with all previous authors, Tasso also situates his experimentation within the process of attempting to adapt classical forms. Unlike those authors, however, Tasso does not apologize for his style but expects it to ultimately secure him future glory.

What are the aspects of Tasso's experimentation that might have caused problems? What linguistic features are most associated with the production of wonder? Unlike many of the previous authors who gloss Aristotle's discussion of foreign languages, Tasso has merely subsumed this topic under a larger stylistic project. In his discussion of the composition of the sublime style, it will become clear that Tasso also offers a solution to many of the same issues circulating by the 1560s. In the first place, he outlines a proper method

<sup>74</sup> See Torquato Tasso, "La Cavaletta o vero de la poesia toscana." Biblioteca italiana, 2003. Web. April 2017.

<sup>75</sup> *Lettere poetiche*, pg. 433.

for achieving narrative flexibility despite the presence of rhymes. Second, he proposes a solution to the issue of the sweetness of the vernacular. In order to address these concerns, Tasso focuses on the problem of syntax and the collocation of words and letters. Through specific compositional strategies, Tasso thus offers the epic poet a means of producing an intentionally harsh sound, one which removes the sweetness commonly associated with the vernacular.

#### 7.4 "COLUI IL QUAL CAMINA PER LE SOLITUDINI"

In his *Arte poetica*, along with introducing the matter of wonder, uncommon rhetorical figures, and unfamiliar language, Tasso also turns to the more concrete matter of composition. He offers a brief statement in which he lists several crucial ways to produce properly epic syntax, meter, and sound:

La composizione, che è la terza parte de lo stile, avrà del magnifico, se saranno lunghi i periodi, e lunghi i membri, de' quali il periodo è composto. E per questo la stanza è più capace di questo eroico, che 'l terzetto. S'accresce la magnificenza con l'asprezza, la quale nasce dal concorso di vocali, da rompi-menti di versi, da pienezza di consonanti ne le rime, da lo accrescere il numero nel fine del verso, o con parole sensibili per vigore d'accenti, o per pienezza di consonanti. Accresce medesimamente la frequenza de le copule, che come nervi corrobori l'orazione. Il trasportare alcuna volta i verbi contro l'uso comune, benché di rado, porta nobiltà a l'orazione.<sup>76</sup>

For Tasso's epic style, the essential components of composition are lengthy periods, the use of *ottava rima*, harsh sounds produced by attention to letter and word combinations, parataxis, and unusual verb usage. This assortment of features might seem odd, given the tendency of previous authors to offer a sustained analysis of more conventional elements, such as meter.<sup>77</sup>

In reality, this passing reference to "la stanza," in opposition to *terza rima*, appears to be the only reference, in the entirety of Tasso's early theorization of epic style, to the problem of meter.<sup>78</sup> The reproduction of classical hexameter no longer seems to be an

<sup>76</sup> *Arte poetica*, pg. 45.

<sup>77</sup> It is also likely that the incomplete nature of this work has contributed to its rather uneven analysis.

<sup>78</sup> In the later *Discorsi del poema eroico*, Tasso does elaborate further, loosely following the same logic seen in earlier authors: "Il terzetto ha troppo stretto seno per rinchiudere le sentenze de l'eroico, il quale ha bisogno di maggior spazio per spiegare i concetti, ed oltre a ciò non ricerca una catena perpetua, né i riposi così lontani, come sono nel capitolo; ma, spiegando i suoi concetti in più largo e più ampio giro, spesso desidera dove acquetarsi. [...] Scelgasi dunque la stanza, o l'ottava che vogliam dirla, per attissima al poema eroico, oltre tutti gli altri modi di rimare che son propri e naturali de la favella toscana; e seguasi non sol la ragione, ma l'autorità di coloro che l'hanno adoperata in materia d'amore e d'arme." *Poema eroico*, pg. 255.

issue for Tasso. Indeed, typical preoccupations with poetic freedom, the sound of rhyme, and the flexibility of the metrical scheme all seem conspicuously absent.

#### 7.4.1 *Reader as Traveler*

Even though Tasso does not explicitly address narrative movement and the problematic sweetness of the vernacular, his strategies for epic style all imply concrete solutions to those very problems. Where earlier writers were concerned with the ability of the poet to move a narrative across multiple verses without restricting their thought to a rhyme scheme, Tasso encourages the production of lengthy periods. And in response to the issue to the issue of "sweetness" produced by those same rhymes, Tasso recommends that the epic poet focus on creating harshness, not only through dissonant combinations of letters, but also other unexpected techniques such as enjambment ("rompimenti di versi"). The earlier issue of coming up with necessary metrical "space" for elaborating epic conceits has now been subsumed under a different principle, that of identifying strategies for producing the effect of magnificence.

As we shall see, Tasso always approaches the question of epic composition in the same manner. After addressing concepts and diction, he always considers, first, the structure of the period, emphasizing the issue of length and the effects of reading such long phrases on the reader. Then, he turns to the nature of harshness, as well as ways for producing a dissonant sound in the vernacular. Apart from the *Arte poetica*, this method appears in Tasso's lecture on Della Casa, his *Lettere*, and even his later *Discorsi del poema eroico*. Let us look more closely at the first compositional strategy mentioned, "long periods," which offers a solution to earlier issues concerning both narrative flexibility and the problem of meter.

In Tasso's lecture on Della Casa, he analyzes a sonnet by the poet on the creation of the world, offering a discussion of compositional strategies used to produce "gravità." After describing Della Casa's sublime concepts, Tasso turns to composition ("la composizione delle parole"). He first comments that the sonnet is structured in such a way that no verse allows the reader to pause.<sup>79</sup> He comments that this "breaking" between verses ("rompimento de' versi") produces an impressive sense of *gravitas* ("apporta grandissima

<sup>79</sup> "[L]e parole in questo sonetto sono congiunte, che non v'è quasi verso che non passi l'uno nell'altro." *Prose*, II, pg. 125.

gravità").<sup>80</sup> This position stands in stark contrast to Giraldi and Pigna, who emphasize the need for repose in the construction of an *ottava*.

In order to explain the effect of enjambment, Tasso turns to an image taken from Demetrius' *On Style*, in which the Greek rhetorician describes the readers of Thucydides as travellers moving carefully down a rocky path:

Disse Demetrio, che i lettori di Tucidide erano simili a coloro che per aspra ed iscoscesa via caminano, che ad ora ad ora intoppano, e sono constretti ad arrestarsi.<sup>81</sup>

In Tasso's view, the readers of Della Casa's sonnet must likewise move slowly in their reading, since the correspondence between meaning and verse has been disrupted. In other words, an inattentive reader may find that the end of a line does not allow for a pause, as the sense of the phrase continues on to the next line as well.

#### 7.4.2 *Enjambment*

The first quatrain of the sonnet offers an obvious example of rupture between meaning and metrical structure:

Questa vita mortal, che 'n una o 'n due  
brevi e notturne ore trapassa, oscura  
e fredda, involto avea fin qui la pura  
parte di me ne l'atre nubi sue.<sup>82</sup>

In this case, the first three lines contain clear instances of enjambment, especially the first and third lines, where an adjective is presented ("n una o 'n due," "pura") without an immediate corresponding noun. As a result, in order to make sense of the phrase, the reader must continue to the next line to complete the substantive phrase ("brevi e notture ore," "parte").

Indeed, for Tasso the issue is primarily that of allowing the reader a moment of repose, the lack of which produces "non picciola gravità."<sup>83</sup> He draws on another image from Demetrius, again used originally to describe the readers of Thucydides:

<sup>80</sup> *Prose*, II, pg. 125.

<sup>81</sup> *Prose*, II, pg. 125. In reality, in the original, Demetrius describes Thucydides himself as someone walking down a harsh and rocky path. Thus, Tasso reframes the original text, transferring the impression produced by Thucydides' lengthy and staccato prose from the author to the reader.

<sup>82</sup> Cited in *Prose*, II, pg. 117.

<sup>83</sup> "Consideri parimente in questo quaternario, che non vi è nel primo o nel secondo o nel terzo verso luogo, ove 'l lettor possa fermarsi; anzi è di mestiero arrivare co 'l senso a la fine, e quindi ancora non picciola gravità nelle composizioni si deriva." *Prose*, II, pp. 126-27.

come le strade lunghe, corte ci paiano, quando spesso fra via troviamo alberghi ove fermarsi; ma le solitudini ancora nella picciolezza del camino ci dimostrano un non so che del grande e del lungo.<sup>84</sup>

Once more the reader is like a traveller. Frequent moments of rest, for example at an inn, make long roads seem shorter, while the lack of inns produces a sense of greatness and length. In the case of Della Casa's sonnet, the lack of rest derives from reader's inability to linger at the end of a line.

The rhyme word, which had previously preoccupied so many early theorists of epic, now seems to have lost some of its power. In contrast to writers who saw rhyming as an inalterable element of vernacular poetry, Tasso—following the example of Della Casa—sees the end of the verse as a much more fluid moment in the experience of reading a poem. By thus disrupting readerly expectations, a poet is able to produce both gravitas and magnificence. In fact, Tasso returns to the point made earlier in the *Arte poetica* considering the suitability of form to matter. In the lecture on Della Casa, he states quite explicitly that the disruption of conventional readings is proper for elevated subject matter: "sì come il rompimento de' versi, così anco questa distanza de' riposi, solamente a le materie [grandi ed elevate] è dicevole."<sup>85</sup>

Later, in his *Discorsi del poema eroico*, Tasso approaches the matter of composition in the exact same manner. He claims that the epic poet should focus on producing a periodic structure which forces the reader to slow down. He also relies on the same image of the traveller walking down a solitary path without any end in sight:

è cagione di grandezza ancora il senso che sta largamente sospeso: perché avviene al lettore com'a colui il qual camina per le solitudini, al quale l'albergo par più lontano quanto vede le strade più deserte e più disabitate; ma i molti luoghi da fermarsi e da riposarsi fanno breve il camino ancora più lungo.<sup>86</sup>

Even later in his life, Tasso thus continues to emphasize the "suspension of sense" for the epic poet.

The novelty of Tasso's disruption of meaning and metrical structure appears most clearly when juxtaposed with an opposing precept for writing in *ottave*. For example, the important Venetian editor Lodovico Dolce advises against the use of enjambment in his widely popular manual for good writing, *I quattro libri delle osservazioni*.

<sup>84</sup> *Prose*, II, pg. 126-127. In the *On Style*, after introducing the "long period," Demetrius cites Thucydides, whose lengthy description of a flowing river offers the best example. He explains the effect of such a long description on the reader: "Long journeys are shortened by a succession of inns, while desolate paths, even when the distances are short, give the impression of length. Precisely the same principle will apply also in the case of members." *On Style*, Section 47.

<sup>85</sup> *Prose*, II, pg. 127.

<sup>86</sup> *Poema eroico*, pp. 292-93.



Ma è d'avvertire, che quantunque alla intera perfettion d'una Stanza molte cose si ricerchino, la principale è, che i versi senza rompimento, o trapponimento d'una sentenza nel principio, e nel mezo del seguente verso, se ne vadano di due in due, che ciò par, che chieggano le orecchie di chi legge.<sup>87</sup>

For Dolce, poets should generally avoid using enjambment, although on rare occasions it is acceptable.<sup>88</sup> This manual was first printed in 1550, though many editions appeared throughout the rest of the sixteenth century.<sup>89</sup> As a result, one of the more popular guides to composition strongly recommended avoiding the very stylistic strategy that Tasso outlines as crucial to the epic poet.

The use of enjambment thus appears to be Tasso's response to the problem of narrative expansion. Ultimately, he finds a compromise between rhyme and blank verse, offering a means of achieving the lengthy narrative sequences sought by Trissino, Bernardo, and Muzio. He is also able to retain the "spirito" and "legame" mentioned by others like Tolomei and Pigna. He thus articulates a way for making use of rhymed poetry to imitate *verso sciolto* without falling completely into prose.

His emphasis on the production of "harshness" also follows a similar logic. While previous authors continually returned to the issue of eliminating vernacular "sweetness," Tasso introduces a contrasting aesthetic range. In other words, whereas earlier attempts to avoid a pleasant sound involved simply eliminating rhyme, Tasso shifts his attention to the overall texture and feel of epic stanzas.

## 7.5 "COLUI CH'INTOPPA E CAMINA PER VIE ASPRE"

Recall that in the *Arte poetica*, Tasso claims that "magnificence" may also derive from harshness ("asprezza"), which is produced by several different compositional strategies, including clashing vowels, enjambment, an abundance of consonants, or emphatic rhythms.<sup>90</sup> In his discussion of long periods, Tasso stressed matters of reading speed and the retention of meaning over several lines. With harshness, his focus is on techniques that are

<sup>87</sup> See *Le osservationi* (1562). *I quattro libri delle osservationi di M. Lodovico Dolce*. Venice: Gabriel Giolito de' Ferrari, p. 236.

<sup>88</sup> Dolce gives an example from Ariosto, and another from Bembo, before concluding, "Non dico già, che alcuna volta il rompere non apporta gravità: ma ciò si dee far di rado. E i Lettori potranno avedersi leggendo della differenza, che è dall'una maniera all'altra." *I quattro libri*, pp. 236-37.

<sup>89</sup> Editions of the *Quattro libri*, often from different printers and sometimes in the same year, appear in 1550, 1558, 1560, 1561, 1562, 1563, 1564, 1573, 1575, 1579, 1580, 1585, 1588, 1597. A brief census was conducted on the *edit16* database.

<sup>90</sup> "S'accresce la magnificenza con l'asprezza, la quale nasce dal concorso di vocali, da rompimenti di versi, da pienezza di consonanti ne le rime, da lo accrescere il numero nel fine del verso, o con parole sensibili per vigore d'accenti, o per pienezza di consonanti." *Arte poetica*, pg. 45.

entirely based in sound. Taken together, these techniques all constitute a particular kind of phonetic texture. His method for deriving this solution remains the same as before. He looks to classical authorities, specifically Demetrius, for general aesthetic principles, which he then adapts to the specific requirements of the vernacular.

This shift from longer periods to harshness follows the exact recommendations found in Demetrius's *On Style*. After discussing lengthy periodic structures, Demetrius shifts to the question of the sound of letters: "In many passages an impressive effect is produced by a harsh collocation of words."<sup>91</sup> For Demetrius, this is specifically a question of "colliding" letters which produce an unpleasant sound.<sup>92</sup> After offering an example from Homer in which the hero Ajax is presented with a string of vowels and diphthongs, he writes: "No doubt the clashing of letters is, as a rule, unpleasant to the ear, but here the very excess brings out the greatness of the hero, since in the elevated style smoothness and pleasant cadences have no place, except here and there."<sup>93</sup>

In this section we will focus on Tasso's discussion of concurrent, "clashing" vowels, a compositional strategy which receives the most amount of elaboration in his lecture on Della Casa. As with his discussion of long periods, his focus remains on the production of a specific aesthetic experience that would distinguish the sublime style from other forms. And just as his statements on lengthy syntax offer a solution to earlier concerns of rigid metrical structures and narrative flexibility, the issue of harshness becomes Tasso's solution to the problem of the sweetness of the vernacular.

#### 7.5.1 *Clashing Vowels*

In the lecture on Della Casa, following his discussion of enjambment, Tasso shifts to discuss clashing vowels ("il concorso delle vocali"). He offers as an example from Della Casa's sonnet the last line of the poem: "E 'l giorno e 'l Sol delle tue man sono opre."

<sup>91</sup> *On Style*, Section 48. Vettori translates, "Facit autem et asperitas compositionis in multis magnitudinem." See Vettori, pg. 47.

<sup>92</sup> Vettori phrase is "literarum concursus." To describe the effect on the ears, Vettori writes "molestus auribus." See Demetrius, *On Style*, section 48, pp. 94-95 and Vettori, pg. 47.

<sup>93</sup> *On Style*, pg. 95. Although Tasso initially follows Demetrius by beginning his discussion of harshness with clashing vowels, he also introduces several other techniques which are specific to vernacular poetry. He also lists enjambment ("rompimenti di versi"), the "fullness" ("pienezza") of consonants in rhyme words, and the energetic intensification of rhythm ("lo accrescere il numero"). Although we will not be able to analyze the rest of this list here due to limits on space, it is worth considering the reasons for which Tasso chose these specific stylistic strategies. Where do they come from? Why does Tasso choose these over other possibilities? Clearly some of them, such as consonantal fullness in rhyme words, come from Bembo's *Prose*, which discusses the production of "gravità," but we are still left wondering about enjambment and rhythmic intensification.

The concurrence of the letter “O” in the last words “sono opre” offers Tasso the occasion to describe this stylistic choice. Yet rather than describe the concurrence of vowels or analyze the importance of harshness for the sublime style, Tasso begins by listing the various positions of classical authors on the question, of which there are two camps.

First, there is the Greek rhetorician Isocrates, who avoided clashing vowels in his orations, thereby producing a composition which was both “soft and gratifying” (“molle e soave”) and “pleasing” (“dilettava”). Tasso himself ridicules this position by referring to the judgment of Plutarch, who questions whether Isocrates can withstand the sound of trumpets and war if he is afraid of the sound of clashing vowels.<sup>94</sup> On the other hand, Tasso points to Plato and Thucydides, who studiously employed clashing vowels (“questo concorso con studiosa cura affettavano”), as well as Demosthenes, and Homer, who also enjoyed the effect (“anch’essi del concorso delle vocali si compiacevano”). Regarding Demetrius’ views on oratory more generally, Tasso further claims that clashing vowels were essential, “era tanto grato a l’orecchie di Demetrio il concorso delle vocali, che disse, che chi da l’orazione il toglieva, non pur la rendeva men sublime, ma da quella in tutto e le Grazie e le Muse removea.” As further evidence of the divided opinions on the matter, Tasso also cites Cicero’s *Orator* and Quintilian’s *Institutiones*.<sup>95</sup>

The basis of this enumeration of classical authors comes from the original passage on Demetrius, which is then expanded in the commentary by Pietro Vettori. Demetrius introduces Isocrates as one side of two extremes, suggesting that the best path is somewhere in the middle.<sup>96</sup> Vettori, who is primarily interested in situating Demetrius and his ideas within the history of rhetoric, glosses this passage by including Plutarch, Theopompus, and the Latin rhetoricians.<sup>97</sup> Tasso’s appropriation of this list of classical authors differs substantially from the discussion found in Demetrius and Vettori. While Demetrius wants

94 “E com’avrebbe potuto costui il suono delle trombe e lo strepito dell’armi e delle schiere pugnanti sostenere, se il suono di due vocali, che insieme s’affrontino, sì fattamente lo spaventava?” *Prose*, II, pg. 127

95 “E Cicerone dice anche egli nell’Oratore, che fra’ Latini non v’era alcuno sì rozzo dicitore, che il concorso delle vocali non ischivasse. [...] Quintiliano ultimamente, nel libro nono, dice che in vero il concorso delle vocali, se ben rende alquanto aspra l’orazione, l’inalza però maravigliosamente.” *Prose*, II, pg. 128.

96 Demetrius writes, “With regard to hiatus different opinions have been held by different persons. Isocrates and his followers avoided hiatus, while others have admitted it whenever it chanced to occur. The true course lies between the two extremes. The composition should not be noisy, as it will be if the vowels are allowed inartistically to collide just as they fall together, producing the impression of a jerky and disjointed style. On the other hand, the direct contact of such letters should not be shunned altogether. The composition will perhaps be smoother in this way, but it will be less tasteful and fall altogether flat, when robbed of all the music which results from the concurrence of vowels.” *On Style*, Section 68.

97 Vettori’s commentary on the concursus vocalium appears on pp. 64-66. That Vettori is trying to situate Demetrius relative to other rhetoricians can be seen in the preface to his commentary and to his translation from 1560, where he argues that Demetrius should be read due to his close participation in Aristotle’s Peripatetic school.

to caution his reader from falling into one of two extremes, and Vettori is lost in his philological erudition, Tasso has constructed two groups with competing aesthetic sensibilities. More than simply establishing a continuity between Thucydides and Della Casa in their use of clashing vowels, Tasso wants to place Della Casa's manner of writing in opposition to another group of writers who avoid and scorn this stylistic technique.

What contemporary practice corresponds to Isocrates and his fear of harsh sounds? Rather than immediately address the problem of contemporary avoidance of clashing vowels, Tasso turns to Petrarch and Dante, who participate to varying degrees in a Thucydidean approach. Tasso offers two lines from the *Canzoniere* which demonstrate an effective use of the concurrence of vowels: "Fu consumato, e 'n fiamma amorosa arse" (RVF 304.2) and "E i miei difetti di tua grazia adempi" (RVF 365.8). In both cases there is at least one collision between words of the letter "A." According to Tasso, Petrarch makes use of this concurrence when he seeks *gravitas* ("ove cerca la gravità")<sup>98</sup> He returns to the concept of *gravità*, which has appeared occasionally throughout his stylistic discussions, and which has now become associated quite explicitly with harshness.<sup>99</sup>

Concerning Dante, Tasso cites two examples from the *Commedia*: "Nel ciel che più della sua luce prende, | **Fui io**, e vidi cose che ridire..." (*Par.* 1.5) and "Vidi **io** scritte al sommo d'una porta..." (*Inf.* 3.11). In these examples, the collision is immediately apparent, since the pronoun "io" is unnecessary grammatically or metrically. For Tasso, Dante worked extensively on polishing the style of his poem ("il qual si conosce che fu da lui accuratamente polito"). Moreover, he could have just as easily written "io fui" or "io vidi." In Tasso's opinion, however, Dante chose to write "Fui io" precisely because of the vowel collision, which produces "greater force" ("maggior forza"). But why should Tasso insist so much on the care that Dante took in crafting these verses? It is at this point that the other side of the debate on vowel collision finds its modern day proponent, the Venetian editor Girolamo Ruscelli (ca. 1500-1566). Regarding the phrase "vidi io," Tasso writes that Ruscelli prefers to "correct" the original text to a more appropriate "Io vidi." Yet rather than improve the line, Tasso finds that Ruscelli has essentially ruined it ("o, per dir meglio, come guasta il Ruscelli").

The specific target of Tasso's argument—that is, those who follow Isocrates—is Ruscelli and his treatise on standardizing vernacular writing, *Del modo del comporre in versi nella*

<sup>98</sup> *Prose*, II, pg. 128.

<sup>99</sup> In contrast to the Bembian formulation of *piacevolezza* – *gravità*, Tasso adopts the dichotomy seen in earlier writers of *dolcezza* – *gravità*, further refining the latter concept to be more explicitly about sound. For a more sustained discussion of *gravitas* see Andrea Acribo (2001). *Teoria e prassi della gravitas nel Cinquecento*. Florence: F. Cesati.

*lingua italiana*, published relatively recently in 1559.<sup>100</sup> Much like Dolce's *Quattro libri* mentioned earlier, Ruscelli's text is an attempt to standarize the writing of poetry in the vernacular following a strictly Bembian model.<sup>101</sup> He is largely against the collision of vowels, which must necessarily take place across words. Rather than elide vowels, he recommends rewriting lines in order to remove the possibility of pronouncing a potentially ugly phrase.<sup>102</sup> Ruscelli is especially worried about the collision of vowels across words, where one of those vowels receives a grammatical accent, thereby preventing any elision whatsoever.

Avvertasi ... di fuggire a tutto poter suo il far cader collisione, o necessità d'inghiottitura di vocali, ove l'una d'esse habbia accento, che questo fa bruttissima, durissima, et oltra modo sconcissima compositione di voci.<sup>103</sup>

He offers several examples, such as "Potrò io" and "sarà egli," which are not as offensive as collision of the same vowel, such as "Vedrò onorato," "Potrà amore," or "Servitù umil." Such vowel concurrence is particularly egregious when it does not occur in a moment where the reader may pause and take a breath ("non sono ne i luoghi delle posature, o del prender fiato").<sup>104</sup> As a result, the reader is forced to slow down to pronounce two separate vowels, which creates an additional pause ("positura") beyond the caesura normally allowed.

For Ruscelli, such pauses produce lines of poetry that effectively contain more than the necessary eleven syllables of *endecasillabo* verse, even as many as fourteen:

Percioché in tai luoghi elle si lascian tutte intere, si prontuntian tutte intere, & il verso [...] non ne viene ad esser lungo soverchiamente di tempo, o di numero nella sua misura, se ben'è di dodici, & di tredici, & ancora alle volte di quattordici sillabe, che tutte interamente con quei fiati, o posature, sieno pronuntiate.<sup>105</sup>

Essentially, Ruscelli is concerned with the effective pronunciation and recitation of verses of poetry. His prescriptions are tied to his own sense of a proper or improper experience

<sup>100</sup> Ruscelli spends a significant amount of time describing vowel collision and pronunciation. Citations will be taken from *Del modo di comporre in versi nella lingua italiana, trattato di Girolamo Ruscelli, nuovamente ristampato*. Venice: G.B. Melchior Sessa fratelli, 1563, pp. 49-72

<sup>101</sup> Ruscelli's treatise was much less popular than Dolce's, although editions appeared in 1558, 1559, 1563, 1572, 1581, 1595.

<sup>102</sup> Ruscelli does insist that in certain positions in the verse, such as between the eighth and the ninth syllable, there should always be elision if there is a concurrence of vowels: "[N]ell ottava, perché quindi, come è detto, il verso ha come da prendere l'ultimo salto, convien che quasi mai non si faccia collisione, ma si lascino le vocali com'elle stanno." See *Del modo di comporre*, pg. 55.

<sup>103</sup> *Del modo di comporre*, pg. 67.

<sup>104</sup> *Del modo di comporre*, pg. 68.

<sup>105</sup> *Del modo di comporre*, pg. 68.

of vernacular literary language. His conclusions are based exclusively on aesthetic judgments, and he claims that the sound of extra syllables indicates a "most weak" and "most ugly" verse ("il verso viene ad esser debolissimo, & brutissimo").<sup>106</sup>

According to Ruscelli, modern authors have learned this particular "vice" ("vitio") of clashing vowels from reading Dante.<sup>107</sup> Dante, in turn, had introduced this practice into his writing due to the immensity of his material. For Ruscelli, Dante dedicated the majority of his efforts to his subject matter, and due to his "immense negligence" ("immensa trascuragine") regarding his style, failed to refine his verses.<sup>108</sup>

It is within this discussion of Dante's stylistic carelessness that Ruscelli introduces the "corrections" that Tasso will later censure. Ruscelli writes that, if one is to accept Dante's phrase "Vidi io," the resulting pronunciation would create two separate syllables ("due sillabe") and two separate pauses ("due tempi"), which would be inappropriate for the verse.<sup>109</sup>

Another example that Ruscelli offers, though not directly referenced by Tasso, is Dante's line "De lo scender qua giù in questo centro" (*Inf.* 2.83). According to Ruscelli, the accented "giù" produces a vowel collision that results, once again, in two separate moments of pronunciation and thus two distinct syllables.<sup>110</sup> He suggests fixing this line by changing it to "De lo scender qua giuso in questo centro."<sup>111</sup> For Ruscelli, by tempering the emphatic accent of "giù" with another unaccented syllable (i.e. as "giuso"), the verse contains a more relaxed rhythm: "il verso molto più pieno, & più numeroso, con dar quivi luogo al prender del fiato nella pronuntia."<sup>112</sup>

In response to Ruscelli's proposed "emendations" to the *Commedia*, Tasso insists that Dante not only polished his verses a great deal, but wrote "Vidi io" for quite specific aesthetic reasons. Tasso claims that, not only does the harsh sound produced by "Vidi io" contribute to a sense of magnificence, but the additional syllables are productive of the more general aesthetic category of "fullness" ("pienezza"). In fact, Tasso writes that,

<sup>106</sup> *Del modo di comporre*, pg. 69.

<sup>107</sup> "De' moderni alcuni se ne veggono haver dato in questo importantissimo vitio. [...] Et crederò, che in molti, ancor che dotti & di bello ingegno, sia penetrato questo vitio senza avedersene essi, dalla lettione di Dante, sì come molti altri se ne veggono da ciò imbevuti non solamente nel verso, ma ancora nelle prose." See *Del modo di comporre*, pg. 69.

<sup>108</sup> See *Del modo di comporre*, pg. 69. It is also worth noting here that Tasso praises the appearance of "trascuragine" and "sprezzatura" in the epic style. See *Africo*, pp. 155-165.

<sup>109</sup> See *Del modo di comporre*, pg. 70.

<sup>110</sup> Ruscelli writes that this collision produces "due tempi, & due sillabe, dovendosi per la nature delle vocali, & de' nostri versi restringere in una sola." See *Del modo di comporre*, pg. 70.

<sup>111</sup> In reality, most modern editions use the reading provided by Ruscelli, with "giuso" in place of "giù."

<sup>112</sup> *Del modo di comporre*, pg. 70.

due to the extra syllables allowed in scansion (“nello scander li piedi”), a poet is able to lengthen a verse and produce “greatness” of sound:

e così viene moltitudine maggiore di lettere a rinchiudersi nel verso: da la qual moltitudine ed inculcazion delle lettere nasce la pienezza del suono, che produce poi la grandezza del verso.<sup>113</sup>

Recall that it is precisely “fullness” that Tasso lists in his discussion of “harshness” in the *Discorsi dell’arte poetica*. In other words, “asprezza” is a more complex combination of different stylistic strategies, including clashing vowels and extra syllables.

Tasso continues to rely on the same method of establishing general principles, derived from classical authorities (such as Demetrius), followed by an account of their vernacular adaptation. Yet while most of the discussion of adapting classical principles to the vernacular points to a gap in contemporary practice, here Tasso relies on not only vernacular authorities, such as Petrarch and Dante, but even a contemporary author, Della Casa. More than that, Tasso sets himself theoretically against an important contemporary editor who was attempting to introduce certain poetic standards into the vernacular. Thus while we saw earlier that, according to Tasso, Trissino and Ariosto fail to achieve epic style, so here we find Tasso working against the attempts to standardize the vernacular language by his contemporaries.<sup>114</sup>

Tasso’s goal is to refine contemporary understanding of *gravitas*, which he opposes directly to sweetness. Indeed, he claims that the concurrence of vowels should not be used by those who want to write sweet poetry: “Ma se pur è lecito questo tal concorso di vocali, non sia mai lecito ove più la dolcezza che la gravità si richiede.”<sup>115</sup> Tasso echoes the concerns seen in earlier writers with the overly “sweet” nature of the vernacular, which had been largely attributed to the issues of rhyme and vowels. As a solution to this specific aesthetic problem, Tasso points to the use of clashing vowels, which converts the formerly “sweet” quality of the language into a mechanism for its antithesis. Moreover, such a strategy works against the typically smooth rhythms of hendecasyllable by allowing for more effective grammatical syllables within a line of poetry. As a result, by reacting to attempts to standardize according to a certain sensibility, Tasso responds to a perceived gap in the stylistic possibilities of the vernacular.

<sup>113</sup> *Prose*, II, pg. 124.

<sup>114</sup> On Tasso’s side of the debate, there is also Antonio Minturno, who supports the use of the *concorso di vocali*. In fact, Minturno, in his *Arte poetica* criticizes those who would avoid this technique: “Loaonde è molto da ridere il precetto di coloro che commandano doversi lo scontro delle medesime lettere o syllabe fuggire.” *L’Arte poetica del Sig. Antonio Minturno, etc* (1563). Venice: Andrea Valvassori, pg. 326. For a more sustained discussion, see Afrifo, *Teoria e prassi*, pp. 76-95.

<sup>115</sup> *Prose*, II, pg. 125.

7.5.2 *Harshness*

This elaborate analysis of the concurrence of vowels appears in all of Tasso's writings on style, from his *Considerazioni* on the poems by Pigna (ca. 1570) to his later dialogue *La Cavaletta* (composed ca. 1584).<sup>116</sup> Throughout his writings, his conception of clashing vowels remains constant. Such continuity can be seen when looking at his last discussion of the sublime style in the *Discorsi del poema eroico*.

In the fifth book, Tasso returns again to the concurrence of vowels ("concorso delle vocali") which produces "harshness" ("asprezza"). He repeats the same lines of poetry from Petrarch seen in the lecture on Della Casa before turning to Dante, whose poetry receives a much more expanded analysis. He begins by citing lines in which "the vowels are not just swallowed, but almost produce an abyss" ("in quelli [versi] di Dante, ne' quali non s'inghiottono le vocali, ma si fa quasi una apertura ed una voragine")<sup>117</sup> He then cites several verses from the *Commedia*, including the two seen previously ("Fui io...," "Vidi io..."), before describing the physiological effect of pronouncing these collisions:

quantunque il concorso dell'I non faccia così gran voragine o iato, come quello de l'A e de l'O, per cui sogliamo più aprir la bocca. Tutte queste cose sogliono senza dubbio esser cagion de' medesimi effetti, perché la composizione molle ed eguale è forse più cara e piacevole a gli orecchi, ma non ha loco ne la magnificenza.<sup>118</sup>

Tasso has here refined his earlier position. Essentially he has adopted Ruscelli's concern for the effective pronunciation of clashing vowels, although he has also come to a different conclusion. The unpleasantness generated by such sounds is, for Tasso, a reason for a positive aesthetic judgment. Once again, he contrasts such desirable strategy for

<sup>116</sup> In the *Considerazioni sopra tre canzoni di M. Gio. Battista Pigna*, Tasso compares Pigna to Petrarch, writing, "L'uno [i.e. Petrarch] è più dilicato nella composizione delle parole, e dei numeri: l'altro [i.e. Pigna] più pieno, e più rotondo; nè schiva il concorso delle vocali ea, eo, eu, ou, oo, come schivò il Petrarca, e con maggior religione il Casa ed il Bembo, e come fra gli antichi schivò Isocrate; ricordandosi che Isocrate per questa accuratezza, o superstiziosa o lodevole che sia, fu schernito da molti maestri di dire; e che Demetrio Falereo approva il concorso delle vocali nello stile magnifico." In the *Cavaletta*, there is ample discussion of gravitas and sound. Regarding the rhyme scheme, Tasso writes, "[il Casa] elegesse la testura più degna de l'altre, [...] perché egli scelse pur una di quelle che sono più tosto acconcie a la grandezza e a la gravità ch'a la dolcezza e a la piacevolezza, molto l'avanza nel fine del sonetto con la scelta de le parole e con lumi e con gli ornamenti, e particolarmente con la pienza de le consonanti e co 'l numero e co 'l suono de' versi." See *Prose*, II, pg. 110. The *Considerazioni* themselves begin on pg. 71.

<sup>117</sup> *Poema eroico*, pg. 204.

<sup>118</sup> Bembo makes a similar point about pronouncing "A" and "O": "le labbra alquanto in fuori si sporgono, e in cerchio, il che ritondo e sonoro [suono] ne 'l fa uscire." Pietro Bembo and Carlo Dionisotti (1966). *Prose e rime*. Turin: UTET, pg. 147). It is also interesting to note that, while Tasso was convinced of Dante's stylistic refinement in the lecture on Della Casa, here he has changed his mind somewhat. He writes that he is unsure whether or not Dante meant to produce these vowel clashes, "io non mi risolvo a dire se fosse o artificio o caso."



“magnificenza” with more conventionally pleasant sounds (“più cara e piacevole a gli orecchi”).

Tasso’s continued engagement with Ruscelli’s position in the *Poema eroico* is also apparent in the additional examples from Dante that he provides, such as the verse “Poi è Cleopatra lussuriosa” (*Inf.* 5.63). This line is quoted in Ruscelli’s own *Del modo di comporre*, where the rhythm produced by the position of the vowels is an example of something to be avoided at all costs (“da fuggirsi con ogni industria”)<sup>119</sup>. In fact, for Ruscelli, Dante has provided a line that resists any initial, and presumably natural, manner of recitation. The accepted reading of this line places the stress unnaturally on the last syllable of “Cleopatra.” Ruscelli complains that if you wish to avoid this pronunciation, you are forced to adopt an even more extreme solution, whereby a semantically insignificant “Poi è” is emphasized. By thus saving the pronunciation of “Cleopatra,” the rest of the line sounds strange:

Nelquale [verso] chi non vuol pronuntiar Cleopatra, con l’accento nell’ultima sillaba, che però sarebbe sconcissimo, conviene a forza, che per farlo correre si pronuntii Poi E, con con tener l’accento sopra della O. & l’altro sopra della E. & che la parola lussuriosa si misuri di tre sillabe sole, come se dicesse lussurosa, che in tutti modi tal verso ne viene ad esser durissimo, & brutissimo soverchiamente.<sup>120</sup>

By juxtaposing this claim with Tasso’s emphasis on the creation of an “abyss” while reciting Dante, we find most clearly the opposing positions on the nature of reading poetry. Ruscelli speaks often of needing to rewrite a verse so that it runs (“corre”) more fluidly or performs a quick leap (“un salto”) at the end of the line. Such ease of movement cannot proceed without proper moments to rest, determined by an expected place to catch one’s breath.

For Ruscelli, verses like this one concerning Cleopatra produce a tension where one cannot read the line in a natural way—that is, without pronouncing Cleopatra with the accent on the final syllable. In contrast to Ruscelli’s regime of smooth reading, Tasso proposes a manner of conjoining words and vowels that necessarily produces obstacles, hesitation, and disorientation.

The strategy of harshness—at least in terms of clashing vowels—thus aligns with the use of long periods, where the goal of the sublime poet is to force the reader to proceed more slowly and more carefully. It is in this section on harshness in the *Discorsi del poema*

<sup>119</sup> *Del modo di comporre*, pg. 71

<sup>120</sup> *Del modo di comporre*, pg. 71.

*eroico* that Tasso returns to the image of the traveler. He writes of Dante and Della Casa that they are like travelers stumbling down a harsh path:

l'uno e l'altro nondimeno sono somigianti a colui ch'intoppa e camina per vie aspre; ma questa asprezza sente un non so che di magnifico e di grande.<sup>121</sup>

In reality, as seen above, this image appears first in Tasso's lecture on Della Casa, where he applies it specifically to the reader stumbling across the enjambed lines of Della Casa's sonnet.<sup>122</sup> Tasso's mixture of these images in the lecture on Della Casa, and then his later distinction, gives us further insight into Tasso's continuing emphasis on the reader. The epic poet must always keep in mind the aesthetic experience of reading a work, one which should strive to avoid the rules of balance and harmony emphasized by other contemporary writers.

It is clear that harshness functions as Tasso's solution to the problem of vernacular sweetness. In response to the vernacular using too many vowels, Tasso suggests using even more vowels in order to produce a kind of aesthetic short circuit.<sup>123</sup> Not only do extra syllables produce a dissonant sound, but they also introduce more syllables into a line. In other words, a concurrence of vowels can work effectively as a means of discreetly distancing rhymes from one another. This position stands in stark contrast to the one championed by contemporary writers who were then attempting to promote a standardized poetic language following on the prescriptions of Bembo.<sup>124</sup>

<sup>121</sup> *Poema eroico*, pg. 204.

<sup>122</sup> "Disse Demetrio, che i lettori di Tucide erano simili a coloro che per aspra ed iscoscesa via caminano, che ad ora ad ora intoppano, e sono constretti ad arrestarsi." In Demetrius' original use of the image, he too is discussing the use of harsh languages and collocating vowels in an unpleasant manner." In his own treatise, Demetrius writes that Thucydides himself "has rather the constant air of a man who is stumbling, like travellers on rough roads." See *On Style*, section 48. In Vettori's translation, this section reads: "quemadmodum qui per asperas vias iter faciunt" See Vettori, pg. 48

<sup>123</sup> This strategy is later picked up by Pellegrino, as we saw in the introduction.

<sup>124</sup> Due to issues of time and space, we have not attempted to locate examples of Tasso's stylistic theory within the *Liberata*. An initial attempt can be found in Appendix I, although further work is still necessary.

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## CONCLUSION

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The preceding exploration of the discourse on epic poetry focused primarily on the interconnected matters of language and society. It is a response to two general tendencies in modern scholarship: first, the insistence that Aristotle's *Poetics* determines the search for epic poetry; second, that priority is given to narrative structure. Despite the sophisticated theoretical apparatus made available by the *Poetics*, Aristotle does not, in reality, offer a particularly practical approach for the creation of epic poetry. The intellectually stimulating account of concepts such as *mimesis* or *catharsis* contributes little to the actual composition of a work of poetry. Nor does Aristotle's text help modern readers address the specifically modern problem of the vernacular, a language with its own peculiar aesthetic characteristics potentially at odds with not only Greek, but also Latin. Indeed, early modern writers had before them the models of Homer and Virgil much longer than the *Poetics*, which was only rediscovered in the 1490s and incorporated into intellectual discourse starting in the late 1530s. We have therefore kept in mind certain questions: How did vernacular authors approach the question of epic as exemplified by such classical authors? Given that the vernacular literary tradition was largely founded on the model of Petrarch, what were the issues facing a poet who wanted to compose an epic?

In an attempt to trace the controversies, debates, and discussion of the problem of vernacular epic, the study followed a roughly chronological order beginning with the debate over meter in the 1530s. For those early theorists, epic is not a problem of genre, or of narrative unity, but of the essential structure of the poetry itself. Yet in these early decades, there are no actual vernacular epics to use as examples, and the conversation is largely speculative. The main issue is that of rhyme: conventional poetry has been founded on a form that is pleasant to the ear, seemingly inimical by its very nature to the *gravitas* experienced with Latin poetry.

By the early 1540s, divisions among intellectuals and poets begin to emerge, and the matter of taste becomes a determining factor in artistic choices. While the 1530s offered a more explicit debate about epic meter, the 1540s present less openly polemical statements. Yet similar issues from the earlier debates continue to linger in unexpected places. The

debate over Speroni's *Canace*, for example, involves many of the same terms and concepts, such as heroic meter and the proper form of *gravitas*.

There is thus a growing pressure on poets and intellectuals to conform to the preferences of the court. Ariosto and chivalric romance come onto the scene for the first time as a fundamental component to intellectual discussion. At the same time, openly classical epics, specifically Trissino's *Italia liberata* and Alamanni's *Girone*, are printed for the first time and fail miserably. As a result, there appears to be a new controversy concerning specifically *classical* epic in contradistinction to more modern forms. Due to the contributions of certain writers, Ariosto becomes officially legitimized as the first heroic poet in the vernacular. The subsequent elevation of *ottava rima* causes problems for certain, more intellectual (or classicizing) writers, such as San Martino, Muzio, and Patrizi. The issue of meter returns, only now it is directed explicitly against the use of *ottava rima*.

By the 1550s, however, chivalric romance undergoes a more coherent theoretical defense at the hands of intellectuals such as Giralaldi and Pigna. Though they both accept that romance is a modern form of "heroic" poetry, they also seem unwilling to set aside the matter of a properly classical epic. They also attempt their own epic poems according to differing views on how to achieve their goal. Giralaldi becomes perhaps the spokesperson for narrative unity, but his views on language stress an easy and simple style, which ultimately earn him criticism from his earliest readers. Pigna, meanwhile, urges for a more dynamic and energetic use of language, drawing on Ariosto's own fluid style. Much of his view is focused on sound, and its relationship to the subject matter. Unfortunately, his own attempt to formulate an epic falls flat.

Pigna and Giralaldi also belong to a group of intellectuals who recognize another writer as the potential solution to the epic problem, Francesco Bolognetti. Unfettered by responsibilities to a court patron and demonstrating a high degree of animosity towards romance, Bolognetti sets himself the task of composing a truly epic poem in the vein of classical works. Mindful of the failures of Trissino and Alamanni, Bolognetti also works tirelessly on the style of his poem. He rejects the pleasantries of romance and the "vulgar" crowd who enjoys singing Ariosto in the streets. For Bolognetti, epic becomes a matter of class distinctions and elite taste. Ultimately, the full poem would not be published, and Bolognetti would largely be eclipsed by one of his own pupils, Torquato Tasso.

Tasso presents a completely unique approach to conceptualizing not only epic, but poetry in general. By the early 1560s, he also formulates an entirely new theory of epic style, which emphasizes the creation of a dissonant and harsh language. This particular style

appears to be a solution to the issues that have long plagued earlier writers: namely, how does one write a classical epic in the language of Petrarch? Previous issues of sweetness, gravitas, and narrativity all return in Tasso's view of epic language.

We have thus attempted to trace an alternative literary history of epic based on the analysis of series of questions and attempted solutions. There are doubtless many other examples to be found than the ones used here. For example, many of the authors examined are from central and northern Italy, primarily the Veneto region. Further research should be extended to address other authors, especially those in Naples and elsewhere. The next step must necessarily be the incorporation of the polemic in the 1580s surrounding Tasso's poem. Even within that controversy, the matter is not merely one of establishing narrative unity. Instead, the polemicists were worried about Tasso's harsh language, jumping verse, and so forth. In other words, the problem of epic continued to be a matter of taste, aesthetic sensibility, and the struggle to establish a dominant cultural order.

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## APPENDIX I: THE SUBLIME STYLE IN THE GERUSALEMME LIBERATA

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The following is a sketch (or to use Pigna's term, a "schizzo") of a future investigation of Tasso's theory of style as it applies to his practice, specifically in descriptions of battles and tempests.

### EXAMPLES OF SYNTACTIC EXPANSION

In terms of practice, we can find several examples of Tasso's theory of syntactic expansion.

For example, in 9.1.1-8:

Ma il gran mostro infernal, che vede queti  
que' già torbidi cori e l'ire spente,  
e cozzar contra 'l fato e i gran decreti  
svolger non può de l'immutabil Mente,  
si parte, e dove passa i campi lieti  
secca, e pallido il sol si fa repente;  
e d'altre furie ancora e d'altri mali  
ministra, a nova impresa affretta l'ali. (IX.1)

Here the subject ("il gran mostro infernal") is interrupted by a relative clause ("che vede...") and left in suspension until line 5, where the main verb appears ("si parte"). Yet introduction of this verb also effectively produces a caesura, since it is followed by a conjunction which introduces a second independent clause ("e dove passa ... secca"). In other words, by beginning the line with the verb, Tasso offsets any sort of symmetry to the stanza, forcing the reader to continue moving forward. Moreover, the verb of this second independent clause is likewise placed at the beginning of the line, with a further conjunction and a third clause appears ("e ... si fa repente"). This highly asymmetrical structure, wherein there is no regular phrasing of syntactical units, appears to resolve by the seventh line; however, even at this point, we find another weak enjambement in the rejet of "ministra."

In this example, Tasso thus employs a 6+2 syntax, which is one of the less frequent configurations. His most frequently structure is 4+4, or 2+2+2+2.<sup>1</sup> As a result, such a

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<sup>1</sup> For a general discussion of Tasso's syntax see Soldani, Arnaldo. *Attraverso l'ottava: sintassi e retorica nella Gerusalemme Liberata*. Lucca: M. Pacini Fazzi, 1999.



construction is particularly marked by its longer periodic construction. Yet even with this 4+4 syntax Tasso is capable of producing a period in which the sense is suspended until the end.

Another example of two four-line periods with “suspended” syntax:

Corre inanzi il Soldano, e giunge a quella  
 confusa ancora e inordinata guarda  
 rapido sí che torbida procella  
 da’ cavernosi monti esce piú tarda.  
 Fiume ch’arbori insieme e case svella,  
 folgore che le torri abbatta ed arda,  
 terremoto che ’l mondo empia d’orrore,  
 son picciole sembianze al suo furore. (9.22.1-8)

While the first half produces a kind of necessary forward movement, imitating as well the speed of Solimano’s advance, the second half is comprised of a series of nouns (“fiume .... folgore ...terremoto”) that are left unresolved until the last line (“son picciole sembianze”). The growing intensity of these natural events is thrown into sharp relief by their characterization as “picciole,” effectively heightening Solimano’s fury.

As another strategy for “suspending the one” across the four-line halves of the octave is through the use of a simile. For example, the death of Latino in Canto 9:

Come ne l’Appennin robusta pianta  
 che sprezzò d’Euro e d’Aquilon la guerra,  
 se turbo inusitato al fin la schianta,  
 gli alberi intorno ruinando atterra,  
 cosí cade egli, e la sua furia è tanta  
 che piú d’un seco tragge a cui s’afferra;  
 e ben d’uom sí feroce è degno fine  
 che faccia ancor morendo alte ruine. (9.39.1-8)

The clearest example of the “senso sospeso” used for producing narrative suspense occurs in stanzas 9.83-84. In this scene, Solimano’s page, Lesbino, enters the fray, while also being observed by Argillano, who rushes forward to kill him.

Mentre il fanciullo, a cui novel piacere  
 di gloria il petto giovenil lusinga,  
 di qua turba e di là tutte le schiere,  
 e lui non è chi tanto o quanto stringa,  
 cauto osserva Argillan tra le leggiere  
 sue rote il tempo in che l’asta sospinga;  
 e, colto il punto, il suo destrier di furto  
 gli uccide e sovra gli è, ch’a pena è surto,

ed al supplice volto, il qual in vano  
 con l'arme di pietà fea sue difese,  
 drizzò, crudel!, l'inessorabil mano,  
 e di natura il più bel pregio offese.  
 Senso aver parve e fu de l'uom più umano  
 il ferro, che si volse e piatto scese.  
 Ma che pro, se doppiando il colpo fero  
 di punta colse ove egli errò primiero? (IX.83-84)

The period begins with six lines structured around a dependent clause ("Mentre il fanciull ... cauto osserva"), followed by the independent clause, itself six lines, with Argillano as the subject ("E, colto il punto ... il più bel pregio offese").

Afterwards there are two short periods of two lines a piece which also offer a peculiar syntax. In the second stanza, the period comprising lines 5-6 contains three members, the second of which is broken by the end of the line: "Senso aver parve," "Fu de l'uomo più umano | il ferro," followed by the relative clause, "che si volse e piatto scese." The last two lines likewise produce a similarly disjunctive structure, wherein a clear caesura in the first line ("Ma che pro") creates the need for a second phrase which moves across the end of the line ("se doppiando il colpo fero | di punta colse").

Such techniques for suspending the sense of a period across an entire stanza are relatively infrequent in Tasso. They should be seen as the extreme case of an overall syntactic tendency.

As Soldani makes clear in his study of the syntax of the *Liberata*, Tasso prefers to use smaller syntactical disruptions. Even in the previous examples, we find this tendency to disrupt a unit of meaning by placing the beginning or end of that unit in the middle of a line. As a result, these phrases exist across the boundary of the verse.

For example, in a stanza describing Solimano's activities while under the hospitality of the king of Egypt:

Ma prima ch'egli apertamente loro  
 la destinata guerra annunziasse,  
 volle che Solimano, a cui molto oro  
 diè per tal uso, gli Arabi assoldasse.  
 Or mentre ei d'Asia e dal paese moro  
 l'oste accogliea, Soliman venne e trasse  
 agevolmente a sé gli Arabi avari,  
 ladroni in ogni tempo o mercenari. (9.6)

In this example, lines 3-4 contain three clauses, with the second moving across the boundary of the line break. Likewise, in lines 5-8, the first line concludes in the middle of the following verse.

Another example of such interlinear asymmetry, in conjunction with a stronger example of enjambment, can be seen in the appearance of Argillano on the battlefield. After an entire stanza introducing a simile, the following stanza begins:

tal ne viene Argillano: arde il feroce  
sguardo, ha la fronte intrepida e sublime. (9.76.1-2)

The first phrase ends with the effective caesura of the line (“Argillano |”); however, the nominal phrase (“il feroce sguardo”) is left unresolved by the end of the line. This example presents a clear use of enjambment, where smaller syntagms are disrupted, producing an even more intense feeling of disconnect between meaning and sound.

There are several examples from the rest of the canto. For instance, in the appearance of Lesbino before he is killed by Argillano:

Un paggio del Soldan misto era in quella  
turba di sagittari e lanciatori...  
[...]  
Paion perle e rugiade in su la bella  
guancia irrigando i tepidi sudori. (9.81.1-2; 5-6)

Such enjambment (“in quella | turba”; “in su la bella | guancia”) is even more effective due to the relative strangeness of using as rhyme words both the demonstrative “quella,” as well as the adjectival “bella” introduced by an article. In these positions, such words do not carry much semantic weight, as they are meant to introduce a more significant substance, “turba” and “guancia.”

These long periods are merely one technique for producing a sense of strangeness and disorientation, which can only occur when the reader does not expect such shifts. Let us turn now to the second fundamental component of Tasso’s epic style, that of harshness.

#### EXAMPLES OF HARSHNESS FROM THE *liberata*

Tasso appears to have been very motivated to incorporate the strategy of harshness into the *Liberata*. During the period of revision in 1574-75, he constantly apologizes to his interlocutors for having introduced too many harsh stylistic choices. Instead, he frequently attempts to “soften” his language. For instance, in an early letter from April 13th, 1575 to Scipione Gonzaga, Tasso writes that he is continuing the polishing of his verses (“politura de’ versi”). More specifically, he is attempting to smooth out several of them, “ché certo ve ne sono alcuni, se non son molti, durenti e talora troppo inculcati.”<sup>2</sup> In another letter

<sup>2</sup> *Lettere poetiche*, Letter IV, pg. 24. Molinari also glosses “inculcati” as “sovraccarichi” and “foneticamente didondanti.” See *Lettere poetiche*, pg. 24 n. 10.

from the same period, he writes that he wishes to “sweeten the rhythm” (“addolcire il numero”).<sup>3</sup> Despite the fact that he frequently apologizes for a rough sound, he also defends an overall strategy of harshness, in particular as it pertains to alliteration, lengthy words (“parole lunghe”), and unexpected word truncation.<sup>4</sup>

Although Tasso never offers specific examples of his practice of harshness, it is not difficult to find examples throughout the *Liberata*, in particular in the battle from Canto 9, as well as one from Canto 7.

The effect of slowing down reading is quite obvious in the stanza cited previously, in which the Christian knight observes Solimano’s page Lesbino as he fights:

Mentre il fanciullo, a cui novel piacere  
di gloria il petto giovenil lusinga,  
di qua turba e di là tutte le schiere,  
e lui non è chi tanto o quanto stringa,  
cauto osserva Argillan tra le leggiere  
sue rote il tempo in che l’asta sospinga.(9.83.1-6)

The last two lines of this lengthy six-verse period introduce the independent clause, which is further punctuated by two instances of vowel collision of the same letter: “cauto osserva Argillan.” Due to these concurrences, the reader is forced to slow down the reading and articulate each discrete “O” and “A.” The sound thus reinforces the meaning of this scene, in which Argillan patiently waits in ambush for a moment to spring forward. His attack is then described rapidly in the space of two lines: “e, colto il punto, il suo destrier di furto | gli uccide e sovra gli è, ch’a pena è surto.” More than merely producing a dissonant sound, the “concorso delle vocali,” also has a clear narrative effect of suspension.

Another example of harsh sounds in battle:

Egli, che dopo il grido udí il tumulto  
che par che sempre piú terribil suoni,  
avisò ben che repentino insulto  
esser dovea de gli Arabi ladroni;  
ché già non era al capitano occulto  
ch’essi intorno scorrean le regioni,  
benché non istimò che sí fugace  
vulgo mai fosse d’assalirlo audace.

Or mentre egli ne viene, ode repente  
"Arme! arme!" replicar da l’altro lato,  
ed in un tempo il cielo orribilmente  
intonar di barbarico ululato.(9.42; 43.1-4)

<sup>3</sup> *Lettere poetiche*, pg. 40.

<sup>4</sup> For alliteration see *Lettere poetiche*, Letter XXVII, October 1st, 1575, pp. 226-27; for lengthy words see Letter XXIX, October 1575, pg. 259; for truncation, see Letter XXXI, October 1575, pp. 287-88.

And elsewhere:

Come pari d'ardir, con forza pare  
 quinci Austro in guerra vien, quindi Aquilone,  
 non ei fra lor, non cede il cielo o 'l mare,  
 ma nube a nube e flutto a flutto oppone;  
 così né ceder qua, né là piegare  
 si vede l'ostinata aspra tenzone:  
 s'affronta insieme orribilmente urtando  
 scudo a scudo, elmo a elmo e brando a brando. (9.52)

Apart from the apparent harsh alliteration of "R" in the opening lines, there is also a frequent concurrence of vowels. Such collisions occur most obviously where Tasso repeats the elements of the two sides of the physical clash, both in the metaphor of the winds and in the actual fighting: "nube **a** nube **e** flutto **a** flutto **oppone**" and "scudo **a** scudo, **elmo a elmo e brando a brando**." There are also multiple instances of the collision of "O" and "A" across semantically significant words: "flutto **oppone**" and "ostinata **aspra** tenzone." Lastly, we find an inconsistent rhythm throughout, most notably in the fifth line: "così né ceder qua, né là piegare." There are grammatical accents available in conventional places within a hendecasyllable line, such as the fourth, sixth, and eighth; however, the emphasis of the words, especially in the monosyllables ("nè," "qua," "nè," "là"), together with the unusual emphasis of "così" all produce an irregular rhythm. The unbalanced and uneven texture of this stanza, from its vocalic collisions to its bumpy meter, also reinforce the image produced, both from the metaphor of the sea tempest and the battle described.

This use of harsh sounds to enliven the description of nature appears most clearly in canto 7, where an infernal storm pushes the Christian troops back into their encampment, where it then uproots many of their tents.

Né quivi ancor de l'orride procelle  
 ponno a pieno schivar la forza e l'ira,  
 ma sono estinte or queste faci or quelle,  
 e per tutto entra l'acqua e 'l vento spira.  
 Squarcia le tele e spezza i pali, e svelle  
 le tende intere e lunge indi le gira;  
 la pioggia a i gridi, a i venti, a i tuon s'accorda  
 d'orribile armonia che 'l mondo assorda. (7.122.1-8)

In the first four lines there is an alliteration of explosive sounds ("P") and more conventionally harsh ones ("R" in the second line). There is also the simple collision of different vowels in combinations such as "sono estinte" and "tutto entra."

The middle of the stanza offers an accumulation of verbs, many of which possess harsh consonantal combinations (such as "S" followed by a consonant). These sounds begin to

pile on with the description of the dispersion of the tents, which is accented by a series of nasal sounds (“en,” “in,” “un,” “in”), which are further intensified with vowel collision (“tende intere” and “lunge indi”).

The climax of this stanza, however, lies in the last two lines, where the crescendo of sounds of shouting, wind, and thunder is articulated through a series of vowel collisions (“la pioggia **a i** gridi, **a i** venti, **a i** tuon s’accorda”). Each concurrence contains three colliding sounds, which slows down the reading of this verse, while also effectively increasing the number of syllables. Tasso then mirrors the phonic intensity of this line by closing the stanza—and the canto—with a reference to the “horrible harmony” of the tempest: “d’orribile armonia che ’l mondo assorda.” Here, too, he employs two vowel collisions (“horrible **armonia**”; “mondo **assorda**”) which are placed in positions that do not allow for natural pauses.

The effectiveness of the harsh sounds in Tasso’s stanza become more apparent when compared with a stanza from the *Orlando Furioso* which offers the only other example of the phrase “orribile armonia.” At the end of canto 14, Ariosto describes an intense scene during the siege of Paris, when the city’s defenders release vats of fire onto the heads of the attacking Saracens:

Aspro concento, orribile armonia  
 D’alte querele, d’ululi e di strida  
 De la misera gente che peria  
 Nel fondo per cagion de la sua guida,  
 Istranamente concordar s’udia  
 Col fiero suon de la fiamma omicida.  
 Non più, Signor, non più di questo canto;  
 Ch’io son già rauco e vo’ posarmi alquanto. (14.134.1-8)

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## APPENDIX II: METAPHORS OF POETIC FORM IN TORQUATO TASSO

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[Originally a chapter of the dissertation, the following text has been extracted for publication as an independent article in *Italian Studies*, 72, 2017, under the title '*Cangiar la tromba in lira*': *Metaphors for Poetic Form in Torquato Tasso*. This is an earlier draft of the article, which underwent revision for the journal.]

... si non possumus omnes,  
hic arguta sacra pendebit fistula pinu.  
— Virgil, *Eclogue VII*<sup>1</sup>

In one of his earliest sonnets, Tasso offers a portrait of his life as a young poet.<sup>2</sup> Providing a narrative for his development as an artist, he declares that the time has come for him to set aside the lyre, an instrument unsuitable for his ambitions:

Quest'umil cetra, ond'io solea talora  
L'amorose cantar prime fatiche,  
Com'uom, cui nulla cura il petto impliche,  
E l'alma pasca di dolce ozio ognora;  
Che poi di Procri il duro caso ancora  
Fè risonar per queste selve amiche,  
L'orme seguendo, e le vestigia antiche  
Di quei, che dopo morte il mondo onora:  
A voi, Muse consacro, a voi sospendo;  
A voi, che pria la mi donaste, quando  
Avea tutto a seguirvi il cor rivolto.  
Or in novo desir di gloria involto,  
Peso molto più grave a regger prendo,  
Peso, per cui si va sempre poggiando.

This sonnet has mainly been of scholarly interest due to its biographical relevance, especially as an aid for organizing Tasso's formative years.<sup>3</sup> In particular, the description of

<sup>1</sup> ('... if such power is not for us all, here on the hallowed pine shall hang my tuneful pipe'). From Virgil, *Eclogues. Georgics. Aeneid: Books 1-6*, tr. by H. Rushton Fairclough, revised by G. P. Gold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916), p. 49. Further references to this work are given after quotations in the text.

<sup>2</sup> T. Tasso, *Le Rime*, ed. by A. Solerti, 4 vols (Bologna: Romagnoli-Dall'Acqua, 1900), III, p. 3. Solerti's edition will be used for Tasso's occasional poetry, which has yet to receive critical edition. For the critical editions of his 'rime amorose' and 'rime sacre', see Tasso, *Rime: Edizione critica*, ed. by F. Gavazzeni and V. Martignone (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> An autograph manuscript of this poem contains the marginal note: 'In fanciullezza', see *Rime*, III, p. 3. Solerti's proposal of 1559 has been accepted by later scholars, including Lanfranco Caretti, *Studi sulle rime del Tasso* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1950), p. 12.



two initial stages of development—first as the singer of his own ‘amorose fatiche’ and then as narrator of the ‘duro caso di Procri’—has led scholars to wonder about the nature of Tasso’s earliest poetry, perhaps now lost.<sup>4</sup> Given the vague acknowledgement of a greater future work, it is generally agreed that the sonnet was written in 1559-60, when Tasso was around sixteen and beginning to draft what would later become the *Gerusalemme liberata*.<sup>5</sup> Yet this description of a gradual ascent through apparently distinct artistic moments—two of which *sub specie lyrae*—offers a more important line of investigation, namely Tasso’s use of metaphor to imagine his own activity as a poet.

Much scholarship has been dedicated to understanding Tasso’s lifelong investigations into the nature of poetry, in particular his prose treatises, which were often in dialogue with other contemporary thinkers.<sup>6</sup> From his earliest *Discorsi dell’arte poetica* to an unfinished work justifying the rewriting of his epic poem, Tasso actively participated in the theoretical discussions that emerged following the re-introduction of Aristotle’s *Poetics* into intellectual life in the 1540s. Yet little attention has been directed toward analysing Tasso’s thinking about poetry within his actual poetry, a mode of thinking that often takes the form of appropriating and reworking images from both classical and vernacular literature. Such images differ in character from the more rigid taxonomies found in Tasso’s prose works, thereby allowing him the freedom to position himself as a poet, rather than a theorist, within a literary tradition still in the process of consolidation. In other words, while Aristotelian categories allow for quite subtle (and quite abstract) discussion on the nature of poetry, the use of metaphors in poetry gives Tasso license to make judgements, aesthetic or otherwise, about his and other works of literature that would not typically factor into an Aristotelian paradigm. An analysis of the structure and content of these metaphors, specifically the metaphor of the musical instrument as it relates to questions of style, will provide a further insight into Tasso’s fluid conception of poetic forms.

<sup>4</sup> See Solerti’s comments, *Rime*, III, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> For an introduction to the early drafts, see T. Tasso, *Il Gierusalemme*, ed. by Guido Baldassari (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2013). For a more general biography of Tasso, see Claudio Gigante, *Tasso* (Rome: Salerno, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> For instance, Bernard Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961). For a general overview of Tasso’s theory and practice, see Matteo Residori, *Tasso* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2009). Other important studies, with further bibliography, are: Claudio Scarpati, ‘Vero e falso nel pensiero poetico del Tasso,’ in *Il vero e il falso dei poeti: Tasso, Tesauro, Pallavicino, Muratori* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1990), pp. 3-34; Lawrence Rhu, *The Genesis of Tasso’s Narrative Theory* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), in particular, pp. 15-57; Daniel Javitch, ‘Italian epic theory’ in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism Volume 3: The Renaissance*, ed. by G. P. Norton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 205-215. See also Gigante, *Tasso*, pp. 76-94.

*The humble lyre*

Let us return then to the sonnet, where the main point of reference is, without a doubt, Virgil. The *Eclogues*, *Georgics*, and *Aeneid* all provide Tasso with images for identifying types of poetry and articulating the development of his artistic life. For instance, in the opening lines of the first *Eclogue*, we find the shepherd Meliboeus addressing his colleague:

Tityre, tu patulae recubans sub tegmine fagi  
 silvestrem tenui Musam meditaris avena;  
 nos patriae fines et dulcia linquimus arva.  
 nos patriam fugimus; tu, Tityre, lentus in umbra  
 formosam resonare doces Amaryllida silvas. (1.1-4)  
 (You, Tityrus, 'neath a broad beech-canopy | Reclining, on the slender oat  
 rehearse | Your silvan ditties: I from my sweet fields, | And home's familiar  
 bounds, even now depart. | Exiled from home am I; | while, Tityrus, you |  
 Sit careless in the shade, and, at your call, | 'Fair Amaryllis' bid the woods  
 resound.)<sup>7</sup>

In his sonnet, Tasso describes his work with a direct allusion to these lines ('risonare . . . selve amiche'), suggesting a specifically bucolic character for the second stage of his poetic *cursus*. In Virgil, we also find the image of a musical instrument, the slender reed-pipe, associated with the idle leisure of the shepherd Tityrus as he sings of his beloved.

Yet the description of a poet who advances from one form to another appears elsewhere in Virgil, namely the *Georgics*.<sup>8</sup> The closing lines of this work describe a poet leaving behind both a former life and an older kind of poetry, an image which closely resembles Tasso's self-description in the sonnet:

Illo Virgilium me tempore dulcis alebat  
 Parthenope studiis florentem ignobilis oci:  
 Carmina qui lusi pastorum: audaxque iuventa  
 Tityre te patule cecini sub tegmine fagi. (4.563-66)  
 (At that time, sweet Naples nourished me, Virgil, while I flourished in the  
 pursuits of honorless otium: I, who composed songs about shepherds and  
 sang, in the boldness of my youth, of you, O Tityrus, under the shelter of a  
 spreading beech tree).

The reference to a lazing shepherd takes on a more self-reflexive character and comes to represent an earlier, more leisurely moment in Virgil's own career. Although there

<sup>7</sup> Virgil, *Eclogues*, tr. Fairclough (1916), pp. 24-25.

<sup>8</sup> A progression of forms also appears in the spurious *incipit* of the *Aeneid*, still present in Renaissance editions: 'Ille ego qui quondam gracili modulatus avena | carmena, et egressus silvis vicina coegi | ut quamvis avido parerent arva colono, | gratum opus agricolis, at nunc horrentia Martis | arma virumque cano'. Unlike the section from the *Georgics*, these lines do not describe stages of the poet's life. See David Scott Wilson-Okamura, David, *Virgil in the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 85-87.

is no precise distinction between two different forms of poetry, there does seem to be a division between an earlier 'ignobile otium' and the subsequent youthful boldness of writing bucolic poetry. This division is made explicit in Tasso's sonnet, where Virgil's 'otium' becomes the 'dolce ozio' of the first stage of his poetry. The second phase of Tasso's trajectory is then further differentiated through emphasis on the honourable character of the bucolic mode, sanctioned by the example of classical poets ('quei, che il mondo onora'). Unlike Virgil, however, the apparent nobility of this second kind of poetry falls short of the greatest glory, which remains largely undefined. Tasso directly ties this 'novo desir di gloria' to an especially weighty subject matter—emphasizing twice the notion of 'peso'. Yet, in contrast to the earlier poetry of the lyre, an instrument which may be set aside, this future weight will never cease to bear down on the poet ('peso, per cui si va sempre poggiando').<sup>9</sup>

Through this hierarchy of forms and their attendant glory, we also find a personalized version of the *rota Virgilii* elaborated in the Middle Ages, a paradigm according to which Virgil's three works (*Eclogues*, *Georgics*, *Aeneid*) correspond to the stages of a poet's artistic life.<sup>10</sup> Though the tripartite distinction between forms of poetry remains, Tasso has rearranged the traditional genres. The didactic genre falls out entirely, ceding second place to pastoral. The earlier, traditionally simpler genre appears to be lyric, with Tasso's 'amoroze prime fatiche' clearly echoing a Petrarchan 'primo giovenile errore'. As a result, Tasso's own *progressus* can be said to begin with lyric before moving to bucolic and then finally to epic, audaciously presenting the young poet as a sort of new vernacular Virgil. The audacity of this self-depiction is made more apparent through the image of the lyre, which has come to represent neither poetry generally nor lyric specifically—or at least, not merely lyric.<sup>11</sup> Instead, Tasso has incorporated into the lyre both lyric and bucolic poetry, both amorous personal verses and more narrative poems.

It should also be noted that the characterization of the lyre as 'umile' is peculiar both for sixteenth century lyric poets in general and for Tasso specifically.<sup>12</sup> Throughout his

9 For instance, Horace in *Ode* I.6: 'conamur, tenues grandia, dum pudor | inbellisque lyrae Musa potens vetat | laudes egregii Caesaris et tuas | culpa deterere ingeni'. (vv. 9-12). For an introduction to the concept of *recusatio* in antiquity, see Ruurd R. Nautra, 'The *Recusatio* in Flavian Poetry', in *Flavian Poetry*, ed. by Ruurd R. Nautra, J.J.L. Smolenaars, and H.J. Van Dam (Boston: Brill, 2005), pp. 21-40.

10 The foundations of the *rota* can be found in Donatus' and Servius' commentary on Virgil's works. For a brief description of the development of the *rota*, see Wilson-Okamura, *Virgil in the Renaissance*, pp. 77-96.

11 Tasso never seems to distinguish between the *cetra* and the *lira*. For a comparison of their overlapping semantic ranges, see T. Tasso, *Le rime*, ed. by O. Besomi, J. Hauser, and G. Sopranzi (Hildesheim; New York: G. Olms, 1994); *lira* can be found on p. 655, *cetra*, p. 238.

12 A simple search for variations of 'umil cetra' or 'umil lira' on [www.bibliotecaitaliana.com](http://www.bibliotecaitaliana.com) produces few results. Although such scarcity does not necessarily prove the unusual character of the syntagm, it does provide a useful point of departure for thinking about questions of poetic diction.

vast corpus, we find the *cetra* and *lira* always described in terms of nobility, harmony, and sweetness.<sup>13</sup> The lyre generally functions as a metaphor for the kind of poetry that is balanced, ornamental, consonant—poetry as analogous to a rhetorical *concinntitas*. In other words, the notion of humility is largely absent. Yet while such phrasing is rare in other contemporary works, the image of a ‘humble lyre’ does appear in sonnets by two earlier sixteenth century poets, Angelo Di Costanzo and Giovanni Della Casa.<sup>14</sup>

In a sonnet first published in 1552, Di Costanzo employs the lyre in order to allude playfully to Virgil’s poetry:<sup>15</sup>

Quella cetra gentil, che ’n su la riva,  
 Cantò di Mincio Dafni, e Melibeo,  
 Sì, che non so, se in Menalo, o ’n Liceo  
 In quella, o in altra età simil s’udiva,  
 Poi che con voce più canora e viva  
 Celebrato ebbe Pale ed Aristeo,  
 E le grand’opre che in esilio feo  
 Il gran figliuol d’Anchise e della Diva;  
 Dal suo pastore in una quercia ombrosa  
 Sacrata pende, e se la move il vento,  
 Par, che dica superba, e disdegnosa,  
 Non sia, chi di toccarmi habbia ardimento,  
 Che, se non spero haver man sì famosa,  
 Del gran Titiro mio sol mi contento.

In broad structural terms, Di Costanzo’s poem is quite similar to Tasso’s. The instrument is introduced in the first line, after which it is described through a series of subordinating clauses before the principal verb arrives in the first tercet. In terms of content, both instruments ultimately end up in a tree. The movement through the *rota Virgilii* is also clear, though here it is described by referring to characters in the *Eclogues* (Daphne, Meliboeus), the *Georgics* (Pales, Aristaeus), and the *Aeneid* (Aeneas, son of Anchises and Venus).

13 As just a few examples: ‘tempra, tu, al canto, Urban la nobil lira | e sia intorno sonar Beatrice udità’ (Solerti, *Rime*, III, p. 44); ‘anzi la cetra e i miei non rozzi accenti, | e me disprezza e le mie voglie oneste’ (*Rime*, II, p. 128); ‘Musa | [...] prendi la cetra ... | [...] | l’alto suon che s’attende | spargi, e de le sue lodi alto contento, | qual di corso là sù veloce o lento’ (*Rime*, I, p. 49); ‘con la cetra, col canto, e con la lira; | saggio Mesa, così gli uomini tira | l’alto vostro poema [...] Da l’armonia qual indi altrui rendete | nascon più degni effetti, alti e divini, | più grato suon, voci più dolci e liete’ (*Rime*, I, p. 377). For more, see Tasso, *Rime* (1994).

14 While the relationship between Di Costanzo and Tasso has yet to be explored, the influence of Della Casa is much more well known. See Tasso’s academic lecture on Della Casa from the late 1560’s, ‘Lezione recitata nell’Accademia ferrarese sopra il sonetto “Questa vita mortal” di monsignor Della Casa’, in T. Tasso, *Prose diverse*, ed. by C. Guasti, 2 vols (Florence: Le Monnier, 1875), II, p. 115-34. See also Tasso’s dialogue *La Cavaletta*, composed ca. 1584, printed in 1587. See T. Tasso, *Dialoghi: Il Messaggiero, Il Padre di Famiglia, Il Malpigio, La Cavaletta, La Molza*. ed. by B. Basile (Milan: Mursia, 1991). For a recent discussion of Tasso’s lecture on Della Casa, see Floriana Calitti, ‘L’invenzione della lirica’ in *Atlante della letteratura italiana*, ed. by Sergio Luzzatto and Gabriele Pedullà, 3 vols (Turin: Einaudi, 2010), II, pp. 218-223.

15 This poem first appears in *Rime di diversi illustri signori napoletani [...], terzo libro* (Venice: Gabriel Giolito de’ Ferrari et fratelli, 1552), p. 84.

Despite the similarities with Tasso's sonnet, this poem has nothing to do with artistic ambition—quite the contrary. For Di Costanzo, the crescendo of forms leads back to the gentle nature of the lyre itself, which seems to proclaim the impossibility of anything greater than pastoral verse. The excellence attained by Virgil remains distant and unreachable. In fact, the focus of the sonnet lies entirely in praising the classical poet's abilities, *that* lyre ('quella cetra gentil') as opposed to *this* one ('quest' umil cetra') in Tasso's sonnet. Thus, while Di Costanzo crowds his poem with names in an erudite game of reference to various Virgilian characters, Tasso openly declares his artistic ability and his intention to acquire glory.

Giovanni Della Casa also makes use of the same image of the humble lyre in a sonnet describing the beauty of a certain lady of the Colonna family, 'Mendico e nudo piango, e de' miei danni'. Here Della Casa characterizes his own poetry as no longer capable of satisfying such a noble enterprise. The closing tercet reads:

nobil poeta canti e 'n guardia l'aggia;  
 chè l'umil cetra mia roca, che voi  
 udir chiedete, già dimessa pende.<sup>16</sup>

Rather than as a Virgilian shepherd, Della Casa describes himself as hanging up the lyre, suggesting a more direct connection between his work and Tasso's. As opposed to Di Costanzo, where the lyre hangs on a tree as a kind of playful allusion to Virgil, Della Casa is much more interested in what the instrument signifies in terms of his own poetic abilities. The humble lyre comes to represent poetry that must be given up due to perceived artistic failure. The 'umile' in Della Casa's sonnet thus contrasts with the 'umile' in Tasso's poem due to the way in which it distinguishes between a lower and a greater form of poetry. Della Casa's humble lyre, further tempered by the adjective 'roca' (itself a surprising metaphor) serves to describe his fatigue when confronted with another poet. By contrast, Tasso's uses 'umile' in reference to own future work, which he will now take up. Della Casa professes his inability to satisfy the requests of his reader, and ultimately he has no interest in glory, a point made by the poet earlier in the sonnet: 'Nè di gloria onde par tanto s'affanni | umano studio a me più cale' (vv. 5-6). Tasso, on the contrary, renounces the lyre because it can no longer provide the glory he seeks, a radical reversal of the *recusatio* staged by Della Casa. For Tasso, the 'humble lyre', rather than symbolise the poet feeling inadequate in his art, instead represents the kind of poetry that is no longer adequate to his growing ambitions.

<sup>16</sup> The poem first appeared in print in *Rime et prose di m. Giovanni della Casa* (Venice: Niccolò Bevilacqua, 1558). See Giovanni della Casa, *Le Rime*, ed. by Stefano Carrai (Turin: Einaudi, 2003), pp. 185-87.

*The trumpet*

That the young Tasso regards himself as a seeker of greater forms of poetry can also be seen in his early chivalric romance *Rinaldo* (1562). In the opening stanzas of the poem, he calls upon the muse to aid him in the composition of the work, beseeching help in the elevation of his style:

Musa, che 'n rozzo stil meco sovente  
umil cantasti le mie fiamme accese,  
sì che, stando le selve al suono intente,  
Eco a ridir l'amato nome apprese,  
or ch'ad opra maggior movo la mente,  
ed audace m'accingo ad alte imprese,  
ver' me cotanto il tuo favor s'accresca  
ch'al raddoppiato peso egual riesca (1.2).<sup>17</sup>

There are several thematic and linguistic continuities with the earlier sonnet: the direct address to the muse, the lyrical-bucolic nature of earlier works, the image of the forest, the turn away from humbler poetry, the poet's ambition. Though no instrument is named, the notion of Virgilian progress is even more pronounced.

Yet while Tasso's use of 'umile' in the sonnet was uncharacteristically tied to the instrument of the lyre, here the adjective is yoked to a much more clearly metapoetic term, 'stile'. This word belongs to the common vocabulary of early modern lyric poetry following Petrarch's use of the term in the opening sonnet of the *Canzoniere*.<sup>18</sup> Typically, sixteenth century poets use the word to refer to the adequacy or expressive ability of a given form of language. For instance, in his *Arcadia* (1504), Jacopo Sannazaro uses the word in much the same way as it is here in the *Rinaldo*. In the eleventh eclogue of the poem, Sannazaro asks the muse, 'àita in qualche parte | il rozzo stil' (vv. 98-99).<sup>19</sup> He too makes a point about shifting between two kinds of language: 'lasciando il pastoral ruvido stile; | Ricominciate, muse, il vostro pianto' (vv. 113-14). Though Sannazaro is per-

17 T. Tasso, *Rinaldo*, ed. by Michael Sherberg (Ravenna: Longo, 1990), p. 63. Further references to this work are given after quotations in the text.

18 The bibliography on the cultural world of 'Petrarchism' is vast. For recent studies with further bibliography, see Roberto Gigliucci, 'Appunti sul petrarchismo plurale,' in *Italianistica*, 34, 2005, pp. 71-75; Amedeo Quondam, 'Sul Petrarchismo', in *Il Petrarchismo: Un modello di poesia per l'Europa*, ed. by L. Chines, F. Calitti, R. Gigliucci, 2 vols (Rome: Bulzoni, 2006), I, pp. 27-92; Stefano Jossa, 'Bembo and Italian Petrarchism,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Petrarch*, ed. by A.R. Ascoli and U. Falkeid (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 191-200. For a discussion of Petrarch's phrase 'vario stile' and its medieval provenance, see Marco Grimaldi, 'Petrarca, il "Vario stile" e l'idea di lirica', *Carte Romanze* 2/1, 2014, pp. 151-210.

19 Iacopo Sannazaro, *Arcadia*, ed. by Carlo Vecce (Rome: Carocci editore, 2013), p. 283. In reality, this entire eclogue is structured around the problem of incongruous style. The opening lines read, 'Poi che 'l soave stile e 'l dolce canto | sperar non lice più per questo bosco' (p. 279).

haps not as focused on distinguishing types of poetry, he clearly uses this term to direct attention to the fitness of the mode of expression relative to the subject matter.

In the opening stanzas of the *Rinaldo*, Tasso also uses the word as a means of signalling the need to shift between forms of expression from bucolic to a weightier subject, echoing the imagery of the earlier sonnet. Much like the *rozzo stile* is insufficient for the 'raddoppiato peso' of the *Rinaldo*, the two forms represented by the 'umil cetra'—that is, lyric and bucolic—cannot possibly sustain the 'peso' of Tasso's ambitious new project. Yet even if we understand this distinction in terms of style, we are still left wondering about the formal characteristics of this greater poetry. Is the *Rinaldo* now to become Tasso's *Aeneid*?

Looking elsewhere in the work, we find two moments that suggest that the answer to this question must necessarily be no. First, in the prefatory letter to the *Rinaldo*, Tasso describes the romance as something not quite at the height of his abilities, mentioning in passing that it was composed in only ten months of an apparent rush of genius.<sup>20</sup> He goes on to claim that, should his poem be well received, his readers can expect to see a much greater work in the future, 'si affaticherà di darvi [i.e. ai lettori] un giorno cosa più degna di venir nelle vostre mani' (p. 60).

Second, the notion that there will be some 'cosa più degna' finds further confirmation in the poem itself. Several stanzas after he has asked the muse to aid him in leaving behind his humble style, the poet turns his attention to praising his patron, Luigi D'Este:

Ma quando, il crin di tre corone cinto,  
v'avrem l'empia eresia domar già visto,  
e spinger, pria da santo amor sospinto,  
contra l'Egitto i principi di Cristo,  
onde il fiero Ottomano oppresso e vinto  
vi ceda a forza il suo mal fatto acquisto,  
cangiar la lira in tromba e 'n maggior carme  
dir tentarò le vostre imprese e l'arme (1.5).

In the earlier sonnet, Tasso had offered no alternative to the lyre, merely juxtaposing it with an indeterminate, though much more ambitious, kind of poetry. In the *Rinaldo*, however, he remains within the metaphorical paradigm of musical instruments, providing a correlative image for that greater poetry: the trumpet. With this shift away from the lyre to the trumpet, Tasso leaves behind not only the *rozzo stile* of bucolic mentioned earlier, but even the longer work that he is currently narrating. Though it might require greater

<sup>20</sup> 'Ma sendo stata di maggior forza in me la mia naturale inclinazione, il desiderio di farmi conoscere (il che forse più facilmente succede per lo mezzo de la poesia, che per quello de le leggi) [...] cominciai a dar effetto al mio pensiero. [...] Sì che avendo ne lo spazio di dieci mesi condotto a fine questo poema.' in Tasso, *Rinaldo* (1990), p. 60.

artistic effort than bucolic verse, the *Rinaldo* is therefore not necessarily the highest kind of poetry available, as it remains inscribed entirely within the domain of the lyre, an instrument which remains insufficient for Tasso's ambition.

But what does the image of the trumpet represent? In the sixteenth century, 'tromba' is generally glossed as simply another way of indicating 'epic poetry'.<sup>21</sup> It was also employed by early modern writers as a metaphor for a kind of celebratory work intended to promote and elevate an individual. Petrarch had written of Alexander's lament upon visiting the tomb of Achilles, 'sospirando disse: | O fortunato, che sí chiara tromba | trovasti, et chi di te sí alto scrisse!' We find similar uses in later poets: in Sannazaro's *Arcadia*, 'Fa che costei ritrove un'altra tromba | Che di lei cante; acciochè s'oda sempre | Il nome che da se stesso rimbomba';<sup>22</sup> poets such as Chariteo (1509), 'Benché di tuoi maggiori i celebri atti | Sonan con chiara tromba in ogni parte: | [...] Contendi superar la fama & fatti | De le passate vostre antiche genti';<sup>23</sup> or Pietro Massolo in his *Sonetti Morali* (1558), 'Et allhor canterò con chiara tromba | L'alta & gran tua virtute; e insino al cielo | Il nome tuo colmo sarà essaltato'.<sup>24</sup> Outside the realm of verse, though still related to poetry, Francesco Alunno, in his *La fabrica del mondo* (1546), places 'tromba' under the lemma of 'Fama', associating it with the concepts 'chiaro' and 'illustre'.<sup>25</sup> The trumpet, therefore, indicates a particular connection with the enduring fame of an individual—that is, heroic poetry understood thematically as the celebration of the glory of past and present individuals. Indeed, the image of Fame playing the trumpet is the single most prevalent usage of this instrument in the early modern imagination.<sup>26</sup>

Tasso himself frequently employs the image of the trumpet in a similar manner. If we look throughout his poetry, we find many examples: 'Fama li coronò, ch'al suon di lieta | tromba sonar fé l'oceano e 'l mondo';<sup>27</sup> 'e qui l'ale depose e questa tromba | la

21 For instance, see Petrarca, *Canzoniere*, ed. by S. Stroppa, P. Cherchi (Turin: Einaudi), 2011, p. 317.

22 Sannazaro, 'Ecloga XII', *Arcadia*, vv. 94-96, p. 283.

23 *Tutte le opere volgari di Chariteo* (Naples: Sigismundo Mayr Alamanno, 1509), Dvii.v.

24 Pietro Massolo, *Sonetti morali* (Florence: Lorenzo Torrentino, 1558), p. 132.

25 Francesco Alunno, *La fabrica del mondo* (Venice, 1548). Apart from being listed as a 'stromento bellico' in the work's *tavola*, we also find it placed under several *lemmata* dealing with fame. Under *Famoso* we find 'Tromba. Tomba. Virtute' (p. 18) and under *Chiaro*, 'Chiara tromba. Virtute' (p. 49).

26 Boccaccio, in his *Genealogie deorum gentilium libri*, describing the origin of 'phama', cites the 'House of Fame' from book 12 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which describes the ever-present sound of 'singing brass' [*ex aere sonanti*]. In the sixteenth century, Vincenzo Cartari relies on the trumpet in his description of *Fama* in *Le immagini degli Dei degli antichi* (Venice: Francesco Marcolini, 1556): '[gli antichi] dipinsero [la Fama] in forma di donna [...] con una stridevole tromba alla bocca' (p. LXXVIII.v). Pierio Valeriano, in his *Hieroglyphica* (Basel, 1556), discusses the symbolic importance of the trumpet: 'Significat tuba famam & celebritatem' (liber XLVII, p. 349). A strikingly similar description will be repeated by Cesare Ripa in his *Iconologia* (Rome: Heredi di Gio. Gigliotti, 1593) under the lemma 'Emulatione'. Under the lemma 'Fama Buona', Ripa also writes, 'La Tromba significa il grido universale sparso per gli orecchi de gli huomini' (p. 74).

27 *Rime*, III, p. 124.



Fama, onde il fé noto a l'Indo, al Moro";<sup>28</sup> 'alte ruine e scogli in mar sonanti | a folgori tonanti, | son opre degne ancor di chiara tromba'.<sup>29</sup> In these lines from the *Rinaldo*, Tasso follows similar usage, promising to bring fame and glory to his patron through singing his deeds (though the lion's share of the glory seems destined to the poet). Yet the force of the metaphor seems to move beyond simply questions of fame. The image of the lyre, together with the reference to 'rozzo stile', both complicate the sense of this particular use of the trumpet. Indeed, though Tasso may be relying on this trope to designate epic poetry, he also seems to assign it a peculiarly stylistic value.

### *The question of style*

To recapitulate, by the time of the *Rinaldo* (1562), Tasso has already demonstrated an intense interest in presenting himself as an innovative force within contemporary vernacular poetry, particularly through his ability to interweave allusions to classical and contemporary poets as a means to distinguish himself. Of those classical writers, Virgil is the primary model. Drawing on the conventional view of a great Virgilian poet capable of moving between genres, Tasso has begun to use metaphors of musical instruments as a means of articulating a hierarchy of forms, from the poetry of the lyre to the poetry of the trumpet. But what constitutes the style of the poetry of the trumpet?

To gain a fuller sense of these contrasting instruments, we can turn to his first treatise on epic poetry, *Discorsi dell'arte poetica*. In this work, begun shortly after the publication of the *Rinaldo*, Tasso continues to grapple with issues of form and language.<sup>30</sup> While the first two books of the *Discorsi* treat epic according to a clear Aristotelian paradigm (i.e. poetry as imitation, narrative unity, etc.), the third book approaches the distinction of forms entirely from the perspective of style.<sup>31</sup> As a result, the question of genre—articulated

<sup>28</sup> *Rime*, III, p. 164.

<sup>29</sup> Torquato Tasso, *Il re Torrismondo*, ed. by Vercingetorige Martignone (Parma: Fondazione Pietro Bembo, 1993), p. 76 vv. 879-882.

<sup>30</sup> The *Discorsi* were composed in at least two stages, beginning around 1562. There were probably four books, the third of which has been lost. For a general discussion on chronology and structure, see the *Nota filologica* in Torquato Tasso, *Discorsi dell'arte poetica e del poema eroico*, ed. by L. Poma (Bari: G. Laterza, 1964), pp. 262-268. Further references to this work are given after quotations in the text.

<sup>31</sup> Given that Tasso himself remarks in several letters that these *Discorsi* had served as an aid in composing his epic, this section is especially significant. In the so-called *Lettere poetiche* concerning the revision of his poem, from the period 1575-76, Tasso mentions his *Discorsi* several times. Regarding a specific matter of style, Tasso refers his interlocutor to his treatise, '... io ne tratto ne' miei Discorsi, ove parlo dello stile.' See Torquato Tasso, *Lettere poetiche*, ed. by C. Molinari (Parma: Fondazione Pietro Bembo, 1995), pg. 257. References to the *Discorsi* also appear in letters IV, IX, and XII. Elsewhere in this collection, Tasso himself emphasizes that his frequent theorisation of style is a practical matter, 'Tutto questo ho detto non solo come teorico, ma come pratico ancora' (p. 455).

earlier according to specific Aristotelian prescriptions—gives way to more practical issues of determining the proper correspondence between poetic expression and a given subject matter.

The importance of this distinction between Aristotelian theorisation and contemporary poetic practice emerges most clearly in Tasso's description of the styles of three 'epic' poets, Virgil, Ludovico Ariosto, and Giangiorgio Trissino:

Il magnifico, dunque, conviene al poema epico come suo proprio; dico suo proprio, perché avendo ad usare anco gli altri secondo l'occorrenze e le materie, come accuratissimamente si vede in Virgilio, questo nondimeno è quello che prevale; come la terra in questi nostri corpi, composti nondimeno di tutti i quattro. Lo stile del Trissino, per signoreggiare per tutto il dimesso, dimesso potrà esser detto; quello dell'Ariosto, per la medesima ragione, mediocre (p. 40).

According to Tasso, Trissino—whose poem *L'Italia liberata dai Gotthi* is considered the first 'regular' epic in the vernacular—should be excluded from the ranks of true epic poetry due to his tendency to use a lower stylistic register.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, Ariosto—despite his status as a modern example of 'heroic' poetry—is associated with the middle style, the same style as the florid ornamentation of lyric poetry.<sup>33</sup> In fact, Tasso will go on to define a moment in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* as an example of language which is 'too lyrical': 'Onde è tassato l'Ariosto, ch'usasse simili concetti nel suo *Furioso* troppo lirici, come: *Amor che m'arde il cor, fa questo vento ecc.*' (p. 51).<sup>34</sup> In other words, Tasso has deftly eliminated the two other potential contenders for the title of vernacular epic poet on account of stylistic inconsistencies. And while Trissino and Ariosto come to stand for two of the three styles, the third is assigned to a poet outside the vernacular, Virgil. Indeed, Virgil comes to serve as the primary means for distinguishing epic language from lyrical, further represented by Petrarch: 'Ma veniamo al paragone, e vediamo come abbia lasciate scritte le medesime cose e il Lirico toscano forse più eccellente d'alcuno latino, e il latino epico più d'ogni altro eccellente' (p. 28).

32 For a discussion of Trissino's poem, see Claudio Gigante, 'Epica e romanzo in Trissino,' in *La tradizione epica e cavalleresca in Italia (XII-XVI sec.)*, ed. by C. Gigante, G. Palumbo (Bruxelles: Editions scientifiques internationales, 2010), pp. 291-320. On the relationship between Tasso and Trissino, see Sergio Zatti, *L'ombra del Tasso: Epica e romanzo nel Cinquecento* (Milano: Mondadori, 1996), pp. 56-110; Stefano Jossa, *La fondazione di un genere: il poema eroico tra Ariosto e Tasso* (Roma: Carocci, 2002); Claudio Gigante, *Esperienze di filologia cinquecentesca: Salviati, Mazzoni, Trissino, Costo, Il Bargeo, Tasso* (Roma: Salerno, 2003), pp. 46-79.

33 For Ariosto's 'canonization' and status as a possible modern epic poet, see Daniel Javitch, *Proclaiming a Classic: The Canonization of Orlando Furioso* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

34 For more on the generic 'contamination' in Ariosto's poem, see Francesco Ferretti, 'Bradamante Elegiaca. Costruzione del personaggio e intersezione di generi nell'*Orlando Furioso*', *Italianistica*, 37, 2008, pp. 63-75. For Tasso's views of Ariosto's 'inappropriate' style, see Eleonora Stoppino, "'Onde è tassato l'Ariosto.' Appunti sulla tradizione del romanzo nella 'Gerusalemme liberata,'" in *Strumenti critici*, XVI, 2001, pp. 225-244.

Yet such comparisons do not ultimately contribute to a clear sense of the way in which one should write an epic poem in the vernacular, as opposed to Latin. In fact, we have the distinct impression that using Virgil as a primary stylistic model might complicate matters, especially when keeping in mind a statement made earlier in the *Discorsi* regarding the specific characteristics of different languages:

Non nego io che ciascuno idioma non abbia alcune cose proprie di lui, per-  
oché alcune elocuzioni veggiamo così proprie d'una lingua, che 'n altra favella  
dicevolmente non possono esser trasportate. È la lingua greca molto atta alla  
espressione d'ogni minuta cosa; a questa istessa espressione inetta è la latina,  
ma molto più capace di grandezza e di maestà: e la nostra lingua toscana, se  
bene con egual suono ne la descrizione delle guerre non ci riempie gli orecchi,  
con maggior dolcezza nondimeno nel trattare le passioni amorose ce le lusinga  
(p. 29).

Tasso's focus here is on the expressive, specifically aural qualities peculiar to both classical languages and the vernacular. Latin poetry, though ostensibly providing the vernacular with its acoustic phenotype, nevertheless manages to produce a fuller sort of sound that is especially conducive to representing war. On the other hand, the vernacular, with its sweet sounds and tendency to sing of love, is ill suited for the creation of an epic. The comparison between Petrarch and Virgil could therefore be seen as a particular instantiation of these two larger tendencies found in languages themselves:

se essi a me diranno, per qual cagione le materie della guerra sono stimate  
più proprie della latina e l'amorose della toscana, risponderai che ciò si dice  
avvenire per le molte consonanti de la latina, e per la lunghezza del suo es-  
sametro, più atte allo strepito delle armi ed alla guerra, e per le vocali della  
toscana, e per l'armonia delle rime, più convenevole alla piacevolezza de gli  
affetti amorosi; ma non però queste materie sono in guisa proprie di questi id-  
iomi, che l'armi nella toscana e gli amori nella latina non possano convenevol-  
mente esserci espressi da eccellente poeta (p. 30).

According to a common view ('ciò si dice'), the two languages are distinguished along rather clear aesthetic and thematic lines. Latin, with its prevalence of consonants and long hexameter verse, can much more easily treat the subject of war. Diametrically opposed is the vernacular, which is given to singing of love due to an abundance of vowels and end rhymes. Yet, such awareness of the sound of different languages, and the potentially impossible task of composing an epic in the vernacular, does not lead Tasso to despair. Indeed, the reference to an 'excellent poet', capable of overcoming the natural limitations of a language, aligns well with his own self-description in both the earlier sonnet and the *Rinaldo*.

And in case we had forgotten his role, Virgil himself will re-emerge later as the prime example of the 'eccellente poeta'. Despite working in a language with a certain aesthetic register and despite using a potentially limited metrical form (the hexameter), Virgil is nevertheless capable of moving between styles and poetic forms:

Si ha adunque che lo stile nasce da' concetti, e da' concetti parimente le qualità del verso: cioè che siano o gravi, o umili etc. Il che si può anco cavare da Vergilio, che umile, mediocre e magnifico fece il medesimo verso con la varietà de' concetti. Che se dalla qualità del verso si determinassero i concetti, avria trattato con l'essametro, nato per sua natura alla gravità, le cose pastorali con magnificenza (pp. 54-55).

As a result, we find both the acknowledgement of the difficulty of writing a vernacular epic and the belief that such problems can be overcome. Although we will now turn back to looking at Tasso's use of metaphor, it is important to keep in mind that Tasso, throughout his life, was constantly theorising proper epic style in a similar manner.<sup>35</sup> With the third book of the *Discorsi*, Tasso seems to pose the thorny question: how does one write a Virgilian epic in the language of Petrarch?<sup>36</sup> All of Tasso's early statements take up these contrasting images and realms of sound, from his sonnet to the opening stanzas of the *Rinaldo* to even his prose *Discorsi*. Yet it is not a question of simply repeating common metaphors, but of working out the solution to fundamental issues of poetic expression in terms of sound and style.

#### *Developing the metaphor*

In his later poems, Tasso continues to refine this mode of thinking.<sup>37</sup> His pastoral play *Aminta* (ca. 1573) contains two clear moments of reflection on poetic form, the prologue offered by Love and a monologue given by the elder shepherd Tirsi, Tasso's narrative alter ego. Both moments are articulated through the same conceptual structure found in the early sonnet and the *Rinaldo*: a specific subject matter is described as lying outside the range of a style; this incongruity is then elaborated acoustically through the image of a musical instrument; lastly, an appeal is made to some external force for assistance in bridg-

<sup>35</sup> For an analysis of Tasso's theory of epic style, see Hermann Grosser, *La sottigliezza del disputare: teorie degli stili e teorie dei generi in età rinascimentale e nel Tasso* (Florence: Nuova Italia, 1992).

<sup>36</sup> Tasso's consideration of linguistic and stylistic difference seems the necessary response to the epic problem as formulated by Girolamo Muzio, an early mentor for Tasso, in his *Arte poetica* (1551). Muzio writes that Italian verse-forms are, unfortunately, 'più atti alla lira che alla tromba'. See Girolamo Muzio, *Rime diverse: Tre libri di Arte poetica* (Venice: Gabriel Giolito de' Ferrari, 1551), p. 86.

<sup>37</sup> For more examples, see his *Rime*, 1994, in particular *cetra* (p. 238), *lira* (p. 655), *tromba* (p. 1215-16), and *zampogna* (p. 1305).

ing this aesthetic gap. Both moments begin with and elaborate on this basic paradigm, and the degree to which they differ shows Tasso's continued reliance on these images to work through an evolving sense of poetic form.

Let us begin with Tirsi's monologue which, though it occurs later in the play, demonstrates the closest adherence to the model seen above. In his speech, the shepherd describes a journey in his younger days to an unnamed city full of virtuous people, where he was inspired to sing of war and heroes:

... ed in quel punto  
sentii me far di me stesso maggiore,  
pien di nova virtù, pieno di nova  
deitade, e cantai guerre ed eroi,  
sdegnando pastoral ruvido carme.  
E se ben poi (come altrui piacque) feci  
ritorno a queste selve, io pur ritenni  
parte di quello spirto; né già suona  
la mia sampogna umil come soleva,  
ma di voce più altera e più sonora  
emula de le trombe, empie le selve.<sup>38</sup>

After leaving behind his bucolic life, Tirsi suddenly discovers the ability to sing in a more virtuosic epic mode. Yet singing of war and heroes requires a song greater than his older 'pastoral ruvido carme'. The distance between that inadequate song and a greater kind of poetry is again articulated through the image of two musical instruments, though in this case, the typical bucolic *zampogna* has replaced the earlier lyre. Despite this newer instrument, the language used suggests a continuity with Tasso's early sonnet: this humble pipe [*sampogna umil*] that Tirsi 'used to play' [*come soleva*] echoes the humble lyre [*umil cetra*] that Tasso 'used to play' [*ond'io solea*] in his youth.<sup>39</sup> In other words, we find here the same notion of a progression through instruments and poetic forms employed by Tasso in his earlier poems.

Unlike those earlier examples, the role of the muse has been removed. Rather than some supernatural force enabling a change in style, the mere presence of the shepherd within a civilized context provides inspiration. The notion of an externally motivated shift in style is not entirely absent, however, and it reappears in the reference to an unidentified

<sup>38</sup> Torquato Tasso, *Aminta*, ed. by M. Fubini and B. Maier (Milan: Biblioteca universale Rizzoli, 1987), p. 87, vv. 633-643. Further references to this work are given after quotations in the text.

<sup>39</sup> The *zampogna* is the instrument *per eccellenza* of the bucolic mode in the vernacular tradition, beginning at least with Sannazaro. See the *congedo* of his *Arcadia*, directed at the instrument itself, 'Alla sampogna' in *Arcadia*, pp. 325-330.

person who wills Tirsi [*come altrui piacque*] to return to the forest and bucolic song.<sup>40</sup> Such movement backward disrupts the linear progression described earlier, and the ascent to glory anticipated in the previous poems has given way to a retrospective account of achievement and regression. With this upward momentum removed, the simple binary structure between epic and non-epic also falls away. In its place, we find a peculiar generic fluidity, as an epic trace remains with the shepherd's music which is capable of ennobling the previously unworthy zampogna. It is clear that the robust nature of this set of images allows him to explore the relationship between poetic forms and genres without putting their imaginative coherence at risk.

With the second example from the *Aminta*, we find a much more refined focus on non-epic poetic form. In fact, Love—the plot's main catalyst—describes his wondrous ability to compel anyone to take up the lyre:

Spirerò nobil sensi a' rozzi petti,  
raddolcirò de le lor lingue il suono;  
perché, ovunque i' mi sia, io sono Amore,  
ne' pastori non men che ne gli eroi,  
e la disagguaglianza de' soggetti  
come a me piace agguaglio; e questa è pure  
suprema gloria e gran miracol mio:  
render simili a le più dotte cetre  
le rustiche sampogne (vv. 80-88; p.56).

The design should now be clear: both shepherds and heroes (symbolizing bucolic and epic forms, respectively) must alter the sound of their song to accommodate a drastic shift in theme; once more, musical instruments serve to anchor the conceit. In this iteration, Tasso has shifted emphasis away from the skills of the poet (or shepherd or hero) to the external force itself, Love. With a particularly suggestive economy of expression, Love describes bringing about the necessary changes in styles, 'la disagguaglianza de' soggetti ... agguaglio'. This centripetal force cancels out the linear progression of forms noted earlier, along with the implied hierarchy of values. In fact, there is no sense of ambitious and progressive movement. Instead, the lyre is allowed its own autonomous aesthetic domain: it is characterized especially by sweetness ('raddolcirò il suono') and skillfulness ('le più dotte cetre').

By characterizing the lyre as *dotta*—that is, requiring skill or training—Love suggests a kind of artistic ornamentation typically unavailable to the shepherd or hero. This distinction is important, as it further suggests that, in the end, one style is not necessarily more

<sup>40</sup> The identity of this person is, without a doubt, one of Tasso's D'Este patrons. See any introduction to the play, for instance Ettore Barelli's preface in *Aminta* (1987), pp. 29-35.

valuable than another. Instead, each form requires its own specific degree of ability. The music of the lyre is not lesser than that of the trumpet—or in this case, the *zampogna*. If anything, the instrument itself is sophisticated, requiring a high level of competence to play well. Such a characterization as ‘dotta’ also fits well both with Tasso’s frequent poetic references to the lyre as a harmonious and complex, and with his discussion of the ‘stile mediocre’ in his prose discussions of style.

Turning away from the *Aminta*, we find Tasso continuing to employ this image of the lyre in his own lyric poetry. In fact, the harmonious nature of the lyre finds its most imaginative formulation in a *canzone* written several years after the *Aminta*, and first printed in 1581.<sup>41</sup> In this poem dedicated to the moon, Tasso begins by declaring the overpowering sensation of his disdain and anger toward that particular celestial body:

Chi di mordaci ingiuriose voci  
 M’arma la lingua come armato ho ’l petto  
 Di sdegno? e chi concetti aspri m’inspira  
 Tu, che sì fera il cor m’ancidi e coci,  
 Snoda la lingua e movi l’intelletto  
 O nata di dolor giustissim’ira.  
 Vada or lunge la lira,  
 conviensi altro istrumento a sì feroci  
 voglie, in sì grave effetto:  
 tal che fin di lassù n’intenda il suono  
 l’iniqua Luna, in cui disnor ragiono (vv. 1-11).

Rather than the conventional figures of the Muse or Love, Tasso here points to his own excessive emotional state as the destabilizing force for the occasion of this poem. The poet finds himself overwhelmed—indeed, ‘inspired’—by ‘harsh concepts’ in need of expression lying outside the realm of typical love poetry. Such clearly un-Petrarchan feelings like disdain and rage necessarily require a register beyond typical lyrical language.<sup>42</sup> Given such an unexpected—and unexpectedly aggressive—theme, the poet uses the image of the musical instrument to signal the widening scope of his poetic abilities.<sup>43</sup> As a result, the lyre once more represents a particular mode of expression, one associated with sweetness and tending towards certain themes. Much like the earlier sonnet, it must be left behind in search for an alternative sound.

<sup>41</sup> First printed in *Delle rime del Signor Torquato Tasso. Parte Prima* (Venice: Manutius, 1581), however I have cited from Solerti, *Rime*, II, p. 418.

<sup>42</sup> In fact, the theme of writing against the moon is quite rare. See Roberto Gigliucci, ‘Contro la luna. Appunti sul motivo antilunare nella lirica d’amore da Serafino Aquilano al Marino,’ *Italique*, IV, 2001, pp. 19-29.

<sup>43</sup> ‘Un-Petrarchist’ themes such as disdain [*sdegno*] begin to appear in the mid sixteenth century. See Andrea Afrifo, *Teoria e prassi della “gravitas” nel Cinquecento* (Florence: F. Cesati, 2001), pp. 21-60; Franco Tomasi, ‘Lettura di “Arsi gran tempo e del mio foco indegno” di Torquato Tasso,’ *Italique*, XV, 2012, pp. 47-72.

This alternative emerges in the language of the poem itself. Explosive sounds repeat frequently, such as 'ci | gi' in the first four lines ('morda**CI**', 'in**GIU**rose', 'vo**CI**', 'con**CE**tti', 'an**CI**di', 'co**CI**'). There is also a surprising number of instances of the harsh combination of 's' followed by a consonant ('**S**Degno', 'a**SP**ri', 'i**NS**Pira', '**S**Noda', 'giu**ST**ISSim', 'i**STR**umento', 'di**SN**or'). The sonic texture of the first stanza, with its frequent and emphatic alliteration, suggests that the image of the musical instrument is not merely the repetition of a trope. Instead, the rejection of the lyre participates in the overall expressive force of the poem. Such stylistic choices also conform to Tasso's own requirements of the 'sublime' style as outlined in the *Discorsi*, where he emphasizes the fundamental importance of producing harshness [*asprezza*] in terms of sound.<sup>44</sup> In other words, the search for new, potentially unpleasant artistic techniques is not limited entirely to the realm of epic poetry. This poem thus offers a further example of Tasso's continual preoccupation with the way that different types of poetry should sound, frequently expressed through the use of various instruments, which typically indicate aesthetic tendencies rather than rigid generic categories. In other words, even though he remains within the 'genre' of lyric with this *canzone*, the 'concetti' in question require a specifically 'unlyrical' language.<sup>45</sup>

By using the image of musical instruments, Tasso thus avoids the fixed demarcation of genre as seen in the myriad sixteenth-century poetic treatises based on Aristotle. Those theoretical approaches, moreover, offer no discussion of common vernacular genres such as lyric and pastoral. Tasso is therefore able to address such gaps poetically, without relying on an overly schematic framework. By their very nature, such images are never entirely uniform in their referent. In one instance, a musical instrument may come to stand loosely for a genre, such as epic, but elsewhere that same instrument imaginatively opens up the formal possibilities of a certain kind of poetry. Indeed, the analogy between a musical instrument and poetic form is particularly illuminating, since the acoustic qualities

44 'S'accresce la magnificenza con l'asprezza, la quale nasce da concorso di vocali, da rompimenti di versi, da pienezza di consonanti nelle rime, dallo accrescere il numero nel fine del verso, o con parole sensibili per vigore d'accenti, o per pienezza di consonanti. Accresce medesimamente la frequenza delle copule, che come nervi, corrobori l'orazione'. *Discorsi dell'arte poetica*, p. 45. Harshness will remain an important component of Tasso's epic style even in his later *Discorsi del poema eroico*, where he will repeat: 'L'asprezza ancora de la composizione suol esser cagione di grandezza e di gravità' (p. 203). He will continue to emphasize the techniques of clashing vowels ('Il concorso de le vocali ancora suol produrre asprezza o piacevol suono') (p. 203) and irregularly structured syntax ('i versi spezzati') (p. 204). For more on the concept of harshness in epic, including in Tasso's theory, see María José Vega Ramos, *El secreto artificio: qualitas sonorum, maronolatría y tradición pontaniana en la poética del renacimiento* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Universidad de Extremadura, 1992), in particular pp. 243-282.

45 'Concetti aspri' also point us towards Dante's *rime petrose*, such as 'Cosi nel mio parlar voglio esser aspro'. For the connections between Tasso's epic and Dante's 'stony poems', see David Gibbons, 'Tasso "petroso": Beyond Petrarchan and Dantean metaphor in the *Gerusalemme liberata*', *Italian Studies*, 55, 2000, pp. 83-98.



of that instrument—that is, the imagined aesthetic experience of listening to it—produces a particular conception of form that is based entirely in the sound of the poetry.

*Imitating the sound of arms* A last example of Tasso's particular interest in the acoustic value of these metaphors can be seen in an exchange of sonnets between him and another poet from 1582. While still languishing in the Hospital of Sant'Anna in Ferrara, Tasso received a letter and a sonnet from the poet Giovanni Antonio Vandali.<sup>46</sup> In this poem, Vandali offers enthusiastic praise for Tasso's epic, which he articulates by describing Tasso's artistic development through a by now unsurprising series of poetic forms:

O sempre glorioso, e quando in carte  
 Descrivi i rozzi boscherecci amori,  
 E fra l'ombre de' mirti e de gli allori  
 Fai che gareggia la natura e l'arte;  
 E quando in chiaro suon di rime sparte  
 Ne mostri espressi gli amorosi errori,  
 L'occulte insidie, onde invaghisce i cori  
 Un finto bello, onde dal ver gli parte;  
 E quando t'ergi, e con sonora tromba,  
 Il sanguinoso orror di Marte e l'armi  
 Canti, e d'invitti eroi l'opre vittrici.  
 Qual altro ebbe mai tanto i cieli amici?  
 Tu Clio ne sei, tu Febo, e ne' tuoi carmi  
 Splende Parnaso, e sol in lor rimbomba.<sup>47</sup>

Much like Tasso's own earlier self-descriptions, Vandali describes a poetic advancement from bucolic ('boscherecci amori') to lyric ('amorosi errori') to epic ('Il sanguinoso orror di Marte e l'armi'). The increasingly positive evaluation of this development can be felt immediately through the tonal shift in the verbs. Vandali begins with neutral technical terms like 'descrivi' for pastoral and 'mostri' for lyric, before using more vivid—and more clearly laudatory—words for epic: 't'ergi... canti'. More importantly, unlike with the other forms, here Vandali describes this elevated song as accompanied by a 'sonora tromba'.

Even though Vandali appears to confirm the fact that Tasso's early quest for glory has come to fruition, he also seems to focus on only one particular aspect of Tasso's work: the subject matter.<sup>48</sup> He begins by describing pastoral in terms of its theme, 'rozzi amori,' which—though he employs the same term that Tasso used to refer to its style—lacks any

<sup>46</sup> For Tasso's imprisonment, see Gigante, *Tasso*, pp. 31-42.

<sup>47</sup> Cited by Solerti in *Rime*, III, p. 384.

<sup>48</sup> The specifically thematic character of Vandali's praise is more obvious when contrasted with other laudatory poetry for Tasso, such as a sonnet from Benedetto Dell'Uva: 'La nostra lingua già molti anni aspetta | Il suo poeta, e sin ad hor non l'have; | Tal ch'è dal pregio suo molto lontana. | Resta, che 'l vostro stil leggiadro, e grave, | Giunto a l'utile altrui, quel che diletta, | Formi l'esempio de la vita humana'. From *Parte delle Rime di D. Benedetto Dell'Uva, Giovanbatista Attendolo, et Cammillo Pellegrino* (Florence: Sermartelli, 1584), p. 37.

sort of elaboration. We have no sense of the quality of this poetry, apart from its treatment of love. Following this rather commonplace characterisation of bucolic, Vandali's moves on to lyric, where his description complicates matters. With this second genre, he introduces the peculiar problem of fictiveness: 'L'occulte insidie, onde invaghisce i cori | Un finto bello, onde dal ver gli parte'. As a result, together with the ascendant progress of forms, there is also a tension concerning beautiful—though fictitious—poetry. When Vandali finally mentions 'd'invitti eroi l'opre vittrici', it is clear that these heroes have not departed from the 'truth' of things, and that this adherence to reality might be the real cause of Tasso's success.

This notion is confirmed when Vandali associates Tasso with two particular mythological figures, Apollo and Clio. Both of these deities were associated with certain sciences, arts, and instruments, with Apollo typically connected to poetry, harmony, and the lyre. Clio, on the other hand, has several important implications. First, she is typically presented wielding a trumpet, which would tie her directly to the reference to the 'sonora tromba' several lines earlier.<sup>49</sup> Second, and most importantly, she is not the muse of epic poetry—a title which belongs to her sister Calliope. Instead, Clio is the muse of history, of *res gestae*, and of classical historical writers such as Thucydides. As such, she represents the triumphant recorded memory of a people, rather than a particular form of heroic poetic expression. Her presence therefore seems to contrast with the reference to the 'finto bello' of Tasso's earlier work, suggesting that Vandali is much more concerned with the historical—truthful—basis of epic, rather than the specificity of its form. As a consequence, the usage of 'sonora tromba' is not tied to any particular stylistic distinction, but instead relates to the glory of the Christian crusade.

In his response, Tasso's own sonnet takes up both Vandali's rhymes and the general movement of his thought, specifically the focus on literary forms. Unlike his correspondent, however, Tasso is explicitly interested in questions of style:

Ardite sì, ma pur felici carte  
 Vergai de' vaghi pastorali amori,  
 E fui coltor de' greci antichi allori  
 Ne le rive del Po con novell'arte.  
 E 'n quelle osai, che fur segnate e sparte  
 D'altrui lusinghe e de' miei propri errori:  
 Ma pur, chi de gli amanti i volti e i cori  
 Colora meglio, e men dal ver si parte?  
 Poi con ardir cresciuto il suon di tromba

<sup>49</sup> For instance, see Ripa, *Iconologia*, 1618, under *Clio*: 'Tiene una tromba, per mostrare le lodi, che ella fa risonare per li fatti de gli uomini illustri' (p. 361).

Volli imitar, cantando, e quel dell'armi  
 che fûr nell'Asia per Gesù vittrici.  
 Or temo: danno forse i cieli amici  
 l'ardire, e 'nsieme la fortuna e i carmi?  
 O pur sonoro stil per se rimbomba?<sup>50</sup>

Compared with Tasso's earlier statements regarding artistic glory, this sonnet presents a rather frustrated and cynical poet. The unwavering confidence regarding the success of both the *Aminta* and his lyric poetry is offset by a palpable hesitancy concerning epic. With his pastoral, he sees himself as audacious ('ardite carte') and innovative ('novell'arte'). With lyric, he is not only daring ('osai'), but, in contrast to Vandali's reference to falsehood, he also considers himself the best at depicting the truth of things ('chi colora meglio, e men dal ver si parte?'). Nevertheless, the pursuit and realization of an epic poem appears reduced to a single verb: 'temo'. The uncertainty regarding this undertaking, which Tasso describes as if it were celestially-inspired, seems related entirely to the creation and reception of a particular style.

This style—defined by its resonance ('sonoro... rimbomba')—is the product of Tasso's attempts to sing, and more importantly to imitate, the sound of the trumpet. While Vandali employs a conventional image of this instrument in order to bolster the martial, and possibly the historical, aspect of epic, Tasso enlivens the metaphor. He does not simply make use of the trumpet as a symbolic token for the topic of war by relegating it to some prepositional clause as Vandali does ('con sonora tromba'). Instead, it is emphatically the sound of the trumpet, together with the sound of arms, that becomes the object of Tasso's poetic aspirations. The image gains in significance precisely because it plays on the more literal, aural qualities of the instrument that are utterly absent in Vandali. In Tasso's rendering, the trumpet no longer simply refers to the genre of epic or to a vague 'orror di Marte'.

The phrase 'suon dell'armi' also immediately calls to mind Tasso's statements in *Discorsi dell'arte poetica* defining the sound of war as more natural to Latin than to the vernacular. By focusing entirely on sound, he highlights the particular problems inherent in accurately and poetically representing individual scenes of war, with its battles and its clashing armies. In contrast to Vandali's hyperbolic and generalized language, which places the poet upon the peaks of Parnassus, Tasso remains absorbed with problems of his individual experience and the specific difficulties of his craft. It is important to emphasize that, in the years between this sonnet and the *Aminta*, Tasso has dedicated a significant

<sup>50</sup> Cited in Solerti, *Rime*, III, p. 384.

amount of time to thinking—and writing—about poetic theory and the composition of his own epic.<sup>51</sup> He frequently focuses on narrative problems related to the use of historical truth in opposition to the fantastical and the fictitious, a requirement for the epic poet if he is to convince sufficiently his audience of the events of the plot. As a result, his choice to respond to Vandali by focusing his attention on style, even while using the same vocabulary and conceptual movement, clearly signals a particular anxiety on Tasso's part.

The structure of Vandali's poem (and Tasso's response) are strikingly similar to Tasso's own self-depiction in the early sonnet we saw above. Virgil's legendary ability to move through poetic forms are mapped clearly on to Tasso's own life, thereby adapting the classical poet to generic requirements of a modern canon (lyric poetry instead of didactic). Despite this clear adoration for his work, the tone of Tasso's response is markedly different from that of the early sonnet. Pride has given way to anxiety about the reception of his epic poem, perhaps seen now as too daring in its stylistic experimentation. This anxiety manifests, perhaps ironically, in the appearance of the metaphor of the trumpet. For Vandali, this instrument refers to the general theme of war, indicating as well the largely historical and doctrinal basis of epic. As a result, the trumpet proves to be merely a common place, one which does nothing to enhance our understanding of the value of the poem; it is simply a poem that recounts a Christian war. Tasso, on the other hand, uses the image to continue thinking about the larger problem of the sound of his poem. The issue is not merely narrating arms and war, but also providing a suitable language that captures the sound of those very things, that is, the creation of an appropriately sonorous style potentially alien to the vernacular.

<sup>51</sup> Apart from his *Discorsi dell'arte poetica* and the *Lezione*, there is also the epistolary exchange with the revisers of his epic collected in in Tasso, *Lettere poetiche*. See also Tasso's reflections on the continuities between epic and the *canzone* form in T. Tasso, *Le Considerazioni sopra le tre canzoni di G.B. Pigna*, in *Le prose diverse di Torquato Tasso*, ed. by C. Guasti (Florence: Le Monnier, 1875), II, pp. 71–110.

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B.A. in Romance Languages and Literatures  
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Minor in linguistics; Graduate with honors; Phi Beta Kappa

### *Research Interests*

Renaissance poetry and poetics, specifically the relationship between style and genre

History of aesthetics and literary criticism, development of critical discourses

Social and material history of the book: production, history of philology, marginalia

Digital humanities: creating new research tools and methodologies

Modern genres: “popular” (e.g. detective stories) and “experimental” (e.g. Wu Ming)



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Instructor, "Reading Hamlet," JHU-CCBC Intensive Summer Seminar (2017)

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Language Instructor, Italian Intermediate (2010-2012)

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*Publications*

"Between Literature and Polemic: Gabriel Harvey and Rabelais," chapter in *The Archaeology of Reading: How Harvey Read his Library* (eds. Earle Havens, Anthony Grafton, Matthew Symonds). In contract negotiation with Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018.

"*Parole appiastricciate*: The Question of Recitation in the Tasso-Ariosto Polemic." Solicited for publication, *Journal of Early Modern Studies*, 2018.

"Old Worlds, New Worlds: Public Research Libraries and Cultural Renew from the European Renaissance to the American Renaissance" in *Bibliomania: 150 Years of Rare Books in the George Peabody Library* (ed. Earle Havens, Johns Hopkins University). Forthcoming, 2017.

"*Cangiar la lira in tromba*: Metaphors for Poetic Form in Torquato Tasso," in *Italian Studies*, 72, 2017.

### *Fellowships and Grants*

Denis Family Curatorial Fellowship, Sheridan Libraries, JHU (2017)

"Antiquity and Its Uses: Reception and Renewal" JHU/Univ. of Warwick Summer Research Grant (2016)

Singleton Chair Summer Travel Fellowship (2015)

Fulbright Research Grant, Rome (2013-2014)

Singleton Chair Summer Travel Fellowship (2012)

Johns Hopkins University Gilman Fellowship (2009-2017)

### *Academic service*

Co-organizer of "The Orlando furioso at 500" conference, JHU (2016)

Panel Organizer, "Sense and Sensation in Early Modern Lyric Poetry," RSA in Berlin (2015)

Chair of Johns Hopkins Philological Society (2012-2013)

Principal Conference Organizer, GRLL Graduate Student Conference, "Counter-Philologies" (2012)

### *Workshops*

"Neo-Latin Studies Today: Tools, Trends and Methodologies," University of Warwick in Venice (2016)

"Resources and Techniques for the Study of Early Modern Culture," Warburg Institute (2016)

"Antiquity and Its Uses: Reception and Renewal," Baltimore, co-sponsored by JHU and Univ. of Warwick (2016)

"Early Book Culture in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe," in Baltimore and Nijmegen (2015)

"Archaeology of Reading Workshop," London (2015)

"Introduction to the History of the Book in Early Modern Europe" Baltimore, Singleton Center Workshop (2013)

*Conference papers*

"Habits of Reading: Gabriel Harvey's Annotations on Renaissance Literary Texts." Marginalia, Academic Itinerary, and Scholarship in Early Modern Europe: From Copernicus to John Dee, ca. 1490-1610 Academy of Arts & Sciences, Krakow, Poland. (2017)

Reading John Dee's Marginalia: Expanding the Archaeology of Reading in Early Modern Europe. Roundtable participant, Renaissance Society of America, Chicago. (2017)

Antiquity and Its Uses: Reception and Renewal. 2017 Roundtable participant, RSA, Chicago. (2017)

"Literature at the Margins: Gabriel Harvey and Rabelais." Archaeology of Reading Conference, JHU, Baltimore. (2016)

"Orality in the Tasso-Ariosto Polemic." Centre for the Study of the Renaissance, University of Warwick, UK (2016)

"Pseudo-Demetrius, Torquato Tasso, and the Quest for Vernacular Epic." Antiquity and Its Uses: Reception and Renewal, Baltimore. (2016)

"The weight of epic on the string of the lyre: Torquato Tasso and the sounds of poetry." RSA, Boston. (2016)

*"Le segrete stanze de' più intendenti: Erudite vs. Popular Readership in 16th Century Italian Epic."* Early Book Culture in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe, University of Nijmegen. (2015)

*"The Sound of Sublimity: Torquato Tasso and Clashing Vowels."* RSA, Berlin. (2015)

*"Prendere il libro in mano: Orality, Writing, and Epic in 16th Century Italy."* Early Book Culture in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe, JHU, Baltimore. (2015)

*"Torquato Tasso and the Development of Epic Style."* RSA, NYC. (2014)

*"Laughter and Marvel in Giovanni Pontano."* RSA, Washington, D.C. (2012)

*"Boccaccio's uomo di mondo: The Transformative Power of the City."* American Boccaccio Association. UMass, Amherst. (2010)

### *Professional Affiliations*

Renaissance Society of America

Modern Language Association

### *Professional References*

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